



DIANA BARRINGTON

BY THE AUTHOR OF
PRETTY MISS NEVILLE &c.





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DIANA BARRINGTON

A Romance of Central India.

BY

MRS. JOHN CROKER,

AUTHOR OF "PROPER PRIDE," "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE," "SOME ONE ELSE,"
"A BIRD OF PASSAGE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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DIANA BARRINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

"BEAUTY AND THE BEAST."

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance on the desert air."

GRAY.

THE Karrhan River, in Central India, winds its stately course beside no great historical capital, no teeming sacred city, or trim, modern, military cantonment; it merely glides majestically through vast tracts of unexplored jungle, wide, sun-scorched plains, belts of magnificent forest trees, and acres of cane.

Once, amazing spectacle! it is spanned by a hideous black railway bridge, over which the train thunders daily at sundown; striking terror into the hearts of the groups of Deer, or Bison,

who may be standing knee-deep in its reedy shallows. Sailing lazily along, hour after hour, you behold no more stirring sight than a lean brown ryot angling for marseer, a blue kingfisher with an eye to business, or a gaunt, supercilious heron;—unless by chance, with a slight quickening of the pulse, you recognise the mighty sign-manual of the lord of the jungle, where from yonder spit of land he slaked his thirst, after a hearty meal on some miserable young buffalo.

For fifty, aye for a hundred miles, the Karrhan sweeps on through a boundless expanse of savage scenery, desolate, splendid, and silent; and the eye, having become accustomed to such surroundings, opens in wide astonishment, when round a sharp bend of the river, standing in prominent relief upon the right-hand bank, a large, solitary Bungalow comes into sight! It is no mirage, or optical delusion, stare as you will, it is a solid fact: A rambling, weather-beaten, stone building, isolated, but by no means deserted; at the foot of some rugged steps, a boat lies moored, the garden and orange groves are in full cultivation, and outside a long range

of stables, several high-caste Arabs stand picketed beneath the cork trees. The deep verandah facing the river is matted, and furnished with chairs and tables, and embellished with numerous horns and skins, not to mention the skeletons of snakes and monkeys, and the grinning skulls of tigers and alligators, that are fancifully disposed along its walls.

On a certain April evening, not many years ago, this verandah was occupied by two somewhat incongruous companions: a large panther, and a young lady. I may as well introduce myself without further preamble. Of course *I* am the young lady, Diana Barrington, commonly called Ranee, aged eighteen, and very much at any one's service, who will be so good as to amuse me, or find some pleasant occupation for my idle hands to do! Jaina, the panther, has been my playmate and companion ever since she was the size of a kitten; she is as demure and decorous as any domestic puss, and is really and truly a gentle and agreeable beast! Perhaps the picture of "Beauty and the Beast" may here rise before some good-natured imaginations; but alas! I

greatly fear that every one's suffrages would be bestowed on Jaina! She is a superb specimen of her kind, young, lithe, and graceful, and her coat resembles tawny velvet, skilfully painted by some cunning hand. At the present moment she lies stretched at full length at my feet, asleep, [with that complete abandon and enjoyment which is ever peculiar to the great Cat tribe. Yes, undoubtedly Jaina is a Beauty; nevertheless I do not desire to pose as the Beast. Like Jaina, I am young and slender—but otherwise, my claims to admiration are but small. My face is pale, and colourless, my features are sharp, and I certainly owe nothing to *my* coat—a scanty white cotton garment, with full body and wide sleeves, made in a fashion that was popular some twenty years previously; a shabby leather belt girdles my waist, and a pair of fantastic gold bangles adorn my thin, sunburnt wrists, and these form my sole ornament.

I have no doubt that my countenance wore an exceedingly cross and discontented expression, as I sat in a low cane chair, with Jaina at my feet, D'Aubigny's "History of the Reformation" face downwards in my lap, and my eyes fixed

abstractedly on the far-away plains across the river, and the distant blue horizon.

Why am I discontented? How promptly I would answer this question! I am tired to death, of my dull, unvaried life, in this old grey Bungalow, which has been my home as long as I can remember. I am weary and heartsick of this oppressive solitude; not another dwelling meets my eyes, as they roam over the river-bank, and lovely but sterile landscape; not a sound breaks the silence save the jingling bells of pack bullocks, who are crossing a ford lower down the river, the "ziz, ziz, ziz" of some irritating insect, and the note of the maddening Copper-smith, or "Brain-fever" bird! For once, my mind has assumed an attitude of angry interrogation. Is all my life to be spent thus? This is my eighteenth birthday. Eighteen years have already slipped away, unmarked by one notable event; are eighteen more to drift by in the same colourless fashion? Am I *never* to see other places, and other faces, or that great unknown mystery called the World—the world which lies beyond those vast yellow plains and vague violet-tinted hills? I long fiercely, and rebelliously—and

quite uselessly—for something more soul-satisfying than the wild, surrounding jungle, and the monotonous sullen Karrhan : perhaps not an unnatural craving on the part of a girl who had spent all her days in a lonely Bungalow in Central India, with no other companions than her taciturn father, and a tyrannical old nurse.

Hitherto I had been tolerably contented with my lot ; but this drowsy, sultry afternoon, my idle thoughts have wandered into unusual channels, and I sit alone, glowering fiercely across the river, and asking myself the why and wherefore of many things—and asking in vain ! Why do we live here alone, aloof from the haunts of men ? Why, except Father Paul's, do we never see another white face ?—and indeed his is nearly black from exposure to the sun. I strain my eyes into the past, and can recall no companions, save those who are with me still. I recollect as landmarks my first pony, my struggle with a gaudy alphabet, the time when father broke his leg, and when Hassan killed a cobra in my bed-room ; then a vista of long and weary days spent over books and figures, rides at daybreak after jackal, and stirring scenes

out tiger-shooting: these memories bring me down to the present time. I know that father enjoys our isolated life, it suits *his* taste in every respect. He is a ripe Oriental scholar—he has actually written two works on Sanscrit—and an enthusiastic sportsman, and when not buried among books and manuscripts, he is generally plunged in the jungle. - Having attempted to sketch myself, I will endeavour to do the same kind office for him. He is elderly, tall, and spare, with a stern brown face, grizzly hair and beard, and rather sad blue eyes—why they should look sad, I have never yet discovered; maybe it is only my imagination? Perhaps I call things by their wrong names, who knows? I have so little experience. Father is very clever, very energetic; imperious, and somewhat curt in his manner, but never imperious or curt to *me*. I often wish he were not quite so silent, for I love the sound of the human voice—my own especially! if he and Peggy are to be believed. As to father's costume, it is as far in the wake of the fashion as mine: it consists of breeches, long untanned boots, with spurs, a linen coat bound round the waist with a gay crimson scarf, and a similar

scarf, twisted into a turban, forms his invariable head-gear. Between shooting and reading, writing and smoking, father seems to fill in his days very satisfactorily, and Peggy Magee has also *her* distractions. Twice a year, she repairs (for the good of her soul, she *says*) to the Catholic Mission at Kolar, a distance of a hundred miles—accomplished in a country bullock-cart—and there she remains for ten days with a fellow-countrywoman, ostensibly to “rest her bones,” thus obtaining sundry glimpses of society, and a sufficient supply of new ideas, to last her for some months; moreover, she is not without resources and entertainment at home! She rules the native servants—and that with no light sceptre—from Hassan, the lordly Mahomedan butler, down to the cheapest garden coolie, and she also attempts to rule me; but this is as futile as her efforts at proselytising our domestics; and she has moreover a potent relaxation, in the shape of a little brown tea-pot, that stands among charcoal embers all day—aye, and all night—long. Yes, between gossiping, scolding, tea-drinking, and managing her fellow-creatures, Mrs. Magee seems to get a good deal of enjoy-

ment out of life ; and this was one of the new ideas that flashed through my gloomy mind, as I languidly turned over the leaves of my book. Undoubtedly Peggy and father had *their* amusements, I grumbled to myself, "but what had *I*?"

My present amusement was supposed to be getting up D'Aubigny's odious history ; for father invariably left me a very long stiff task whenever he went from home ; and he was from home at present. It was well to be him ! it was well to be Peggy ! It was even well to be Jaina, who had no dry books to read, no mind to improve, and had never done anything but eat, and sleep, and play, since Pochell the Shikarri had brought her home in his game-bag, a starving orphan, no bigger than a rat. Yes, undoubtedly Jaina had a very happy life, and I gazed down at her enviously ; as I looked, the Panther suddenly unclosed two glittering, orange orbs, and I was aware that some strange shadow had fallen across the verandah. Turning my head, I discovered an olive-skinned, white-clad Bengali, with portentous turban, inviting my notice by a series of profound salaams.

CHAPTER II.

THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

“Within that awful volume lies
The mystery of mysteries.”

The Monastery.

“YOU need not be afraid of the panther,” I remarked in fluent Hindostani—my thoughtful assurance to all strangers—“she is perfectly tame.”

An odd, almost contemptuous, smile passed over the Bengali's face, and, half closing his narrow, black eyes, he salaamed more deeply than ever.

This smile was not lost upon me—very few things were—and, raising my voice quite half an octave, I imperiously demanded, who he was, and what he wanted?

“Cherisher of the poor!” he replied, “I am

an humble fortune-teller, and your highness's slave."

"And how can you tell fortunes?" I inquired, now looking at him with redoubled interest.

"By these!" suddenly dropping into a sitting posture, and exhibiting a large yellow book and some square brass beads, covered with strange characters and strung together on a silken string. "By these," he reiterated, "and the stars. Missy Baba will have a great fortune. It is written on her face."

"Missy Baba" felt sorely tempted, as she eagerly eyed the book and beads.

"Perhaps," I said to myself, "here was one, who could solve all my perplexities, enlighten my gloomy mind, and raise the veil of the future! But," argued another thought, "He is sure to be an impostor. Fortune-telling is a remnant of the dark ages; and what would your father say?"

However, in the end, curiosity, and an intense craving for any addition to the scanty events of the day, clamorously silenced all my scruples; and with a dignified wave of my hand, I commanded him to open the yellow book, and commence to read my future, without further delay.

"Your royal highness giving money?" he inquired, with an air of insinuating deference.

"Yes, of course," I returned impatiently. "Whatever you like."

"The ornament of the universe, who has eyes and hands like a Queen, and sits with a live panther for her footstool, could not give her servant less than twenty rupees."

"Very well, you shall have twenty rupees," I answered magnificently—secretly greatly delighted with this ridiculous piece of flattery.

The Bengali made a salaam to the very matting, and asked permission to examine my *left* hand. I held it out, a thin brown member, much hardened by the use of oar and reins, and having studied it respectfully for fully five minutes, the fortune-teller collapsed once more on the verandah, and buried himself in his yellow book. In this he remained immersed for a considerable time—all his proceedings were of a leisurely character.—At last, after a period of silent contemplation, that sorely tried my patience, he requested me to "touch the brass beads, and to stand up, that he might draw my horoscope," producing, as he spoke, a brass disc from some

mysterious fold in his raiment. I rose at once as requested, and he immediately commenced to draw a circle round me, looking all the time as solemn as if the fate of a nation was trembling in the balance. At this critical moment, a door into the verandah was flung open, and a brisk little elderly woman, with a sharp, swarthy face, bright, sharp, dark eyes—in short, Peggy Magee—appeared upon the scene.

“Oh, holy Timothy and the saints protect me! and what’s all *this*?” she demanded in a brogue that had lost nothing of its freshness during twenty years’ exile. “What are you after *now*, Miss Ranee?”

“Why, having my fortune told, Peg. This man is drawing my horoscope,” was my calm rejoinder from the middle of the magic circle.

“Drawing your telescope!” she screamed. “Drawing the senses out of your mind; drawing the eyes out of me head! Tell him to be off at wance, or I’ll set the panther on him.”

Peggy Magee was no linguist, and, beyond a slight smattering of Marathi, had never murdered any language but her own.

In answer to this violent harangue, I merely laughed provokingly, and said :

"Nonsense, Peg ; he shall tell your fortune too, if you will only have patience."

"In troth and he won't," she exclaimed ; "nor yours ayther. Be off, out of this, with your books and beads, ye thief of the world !" to the Bengali, who merely raised his impenetrable black eyes, and looked from Peggy to me, with an air of serene neutrality.

"And *I* say, that he shall *not* go off with his book and his beads," I retorted defiantly. "Why are you so disagreeable, Peggy, just because a little pleasure comes in my way ?"

"Pleasure !" she ejaculated. "And ye call *that* pleasure ! Well, well, well, I always knew ye had but little sense !"

"Pallia," I interrupted, turning to a fat, much-jewelled ayah, who was peeping through a doorway, with true native instinct for gravitating towards any sight, "do YOU believe in fortune-tellers ?"

"Some people telling, when their tongue moves, the world moves," replied Pallia in her dreamiest voice.

"And have *you* ever had your fortune told?"

"Never, Missy; these fortune wallahs, taking too much money," rejoined this cautious female.

"But do you believe in them?" I persisted.

"Sometimes telling true," she answered, unabashed by Peggy's scowls and signs. "Ten words not true, five words true."

"Well, five true words are better than nothing," I remarked, as I once more seated myself, and challenged Peggy with a glance of defiance.

"Miss Diana," she burst out—she only called me Diana when she was furiously angry—"what would your papa say?"

"I'll tell you all about that afterwards, Peg; at present, I want to hear what the fortune-teller says," raising my hand to enjoin silence, for I noticed with lively satisfaction that he was at last prepared to impart his discoveries. Squatting shoeless on the edge of the verandah, and reading from the yellow book, he slowly expounded what he was pleased to call "my future life" in sonorous Hindostani, to which most thrilling narrative I listened with breathless interest; Pallia, with a wide display of white teeth, and

Peggy, with a grim countenance, and her arms squared over her apron-strings, in the attitude of some neighbouring idol.

“Well! and I hope he has told you enough lies?” she demanded, as soon as he had ceased to speak.

“You shall hear every word, Peggy,” I replied in my most coaxing voice; “but do sit down, and make yourself pleasant! You know you are just *dying* to hear all the fine things that are going to happen to me.”

“Well then, indeed, Miss Ranee, I am not”—seating herself with a plunge, nevertheless.

“He says that I have a dancing foot, and a singing throat,” I began with some elation. “He says that I am a bird without wings!”

“Balderdash!” ejaculated Peggy ferociously.

“He says that I have no mother; that father is a learned man, and reads the Vedas, that he is a great Shikarri, and that he has been away from home——”

“Pah!” broke in my listener angrily, “and sure, and would not any wan of the servants tell you all that for *nothing*?”

“Wait! wait! wait!” I said impatiently.

"Don't be in such a hurry! He says that I was born under a lucky star."

"Then God knows ye were not," exclaimed Peggy, with an emphasis that was as fierce as it was startling.

"He tells me that I shall soon see strange white faces."

"The sorra a wan, save Father Paul's! Where else would ye see a Christian in this dissolute wilderness?"

"He says that the three greatest events of my life will happen at the full of the moon."

"Oh faix, then, 'tis himself is making rare sport of you!" she remarked derisively. "Sure the full of the moon is the grand time for mad people!"

"He says that I shall marry," I continued doggedly.

"Oh, av coorse," she sneered; "and if *I* was to give him a couple of rupees, he would promise as much for *me*."

"Now, Peggy!" I cried, blazing out at last, "if you interrupt again, you shall not hear another word."

"Oh, well, well, well! say your say, 'tis you

that loves to do the talking ! An' what more ? ”

“ A woman is to exercise great influence over my life.”

“ That’s meeself, I take it,” she muttered with a sniff.

“ And—and—and——” here I broke down quite suddenly.

“ And what ? ” she demanded, “ come, *out* with it ! ”

“ A Rat will bring me Happiness—and an Elephant, Fortune,” I faltered rather sheepishly.

“ A Rat, and an Elephant ! ” she shrieked, bursting into a loud contemptuous laugh. “ An Elephant ! No less ! You’re sure it wasn’t an *ass* ? ”

I shook my head indignantly, and went on : “ On the whole, I am to have a happy life. I shall meet with clouds, but they will pass ; my future will be sunny, and my life long ! ”

“ The Lord send it ! ” said Peggy in her driest tone. “ And how much are you to pay for all this ? ”

“ Only twenty rupees,” I rejoined indifferently.

“ *Only* twenty rupees ! ” she repeated. “ Did

I ever hear the like of that? Why, I'd have promised you a king, and a palace, for quarter the price. Twenty rupees! Well, if that doesn't bate all!"

As Mrs. Magee had thrown in her angry and scornful interruptions, and received each separate prediction with a sneer of derision, their author stood aloof, with folded arms and impassive face, and surveyed her with an air of unruffled dignity. He was ignorant of her actual words, but fully alive to their import—contempt requires no verbal interpretation. The fiery little Irishwoman could not resist the temptation of having one good fling in her own tongue, and shaking her fist close under his chiselled nose, she screamed:

"You're an imposther! And I don't believe wan word of your lies, ye slutherin vagabond; not if you were to go down on your knees, and swear to them on the Bible; so there's for ye!"

"The owl is a small bird, but it has a loud screech," observed the Bengali, with aggravating composure.

"What's that he is after saying, Miss Ranee?" she demanded furiously.

"Oh, never mind! nothing particular—only something about birds," I replied with extraordinary prudence. "Pay him, and let him go."

"And I suppose, I bid give the money, since you passed your word?" glaring at him as she spoke.

"Of course, Peggy."

"Well, it's a terrible sum, for the purest tomfoolery!"

"May be so, Peg; but you must remember how seldom I have a chance of spending any money; and if what he says comes true; and I get fortune, and friends, and wonderful good luck; *all* for the paltry sum of twenty rupees, I am sure no one will deny that I have made an excellent bargain."

So saying, I stooped and picked up D'Aubigny's masterpiece, and sauntering down the verandah accompanied by Jaina, passed out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

EIGHTEEN YEARS.

“The story of my life from year to year.”

IF there be any truth in the old adage, I ought to have been one of the healthiest and wisest of my sex! From my tenderest age, I had been afoot soon after dawn, and had retired to rest not much later than the birds. In my childhood, the intervening hours of the long, long, Indian days were filled in by a ride on my pony, lessons, play, a walk with Peggy—supper, and bed. As years rolled on, my pony was exchanged for a horse, pot-hooks and hangers for Latin and algebra, and my doll was superseded by the chess-board — having received tearful and honourable burial in a cigar box in the garden. My education was decidedly

of a masculine character. Father taught me to construe Virgil, and triumphantly assisted me over the *pons asinorum*. I wrote a fine bold hand, had a decided taste for mathematics—but not the smallest idea of the value of money—and was fairly well grounded in English literature. Morally, I had been trained to speak the truth, to abhor all manner of deceit, treachery, and cruelty, and, indeed, had more than once given a practical illustration of the benefit of my education, by administering justice from the side-saddle, and personally chastising men who were ill-using children, and children who were maltreating animals! With regard to my accomplishments I cannot say much for myself! I can play chess, I can sew and darn, I can whistle, and I am a respectable shot, and an experienced horse-woman; that is to say, I have been accustomed from childhood to gallop over rough ground, to clear nullahs, and swim rivers; more than this—and I tell it with some diffidence—I can ride sideways at full gallop on father's saddle—a performance highly obnoxious to Peggy, and stigmatised as “tricks and capers;” indeed, I am as much at home on horseback as a duck

is in its own particular pond. I have, I believe, a warm heart and temper, an unbounded fund of intelligent curiosity, and unlimited capacities for getting up the steam, about the most trivial event, at the shortest possible notice! I have also an enormous, if uncultivated, organ of wonder—which organ was no doubt subsequently a very great trial and bore to my acquaintances. But to sum up my accomplishments, such as they are: I can ride and shoot, pull a strong oar, and play a fairly good game of chess; besides this, I am learned in all the lore of the jungle. I know the names of the various grain crops, and can tell at a glance where the Gram merges into acres of Cholum, and Cholum gives place to Kodo—that mean, but useful product of the poorest land. The jungle trees, too, are all, as it were, my friends. I like the noble Banyan, the holy Peepul, the delicate Tamarind, the Teak with its enormous leaves, the Ebony tree, the Shisham, and even the beautiful, wicked Mowha—whose flowers distil Daroo, that maddening native liquor. I am intimately acquainted with all the birds, from the hideous kite to the delicate flycatcher; and down in the sands

of river-beds, where the clear, bright water trickles temptingly among dark blue rocks, and where there are shady nooks and inviting pools, I can read in a second *who* have been slaking their thirst—from the pug of the tiger to the paw of the jackal—the sambur, bear, cheetah, pig, panther, hyena: I know them all, as well as I know my alphabet!

So much for my accomplishments. But on the other hand, I have never seen a piano, never seen a picture, never written a letter, never heard of crewel work, crazy work, the game of lawn tennis, or the latest fashions. Alas! that I must confess the truth, I am nothing but an ignorant, uncivilised, uncouth, little jungle girl. A jungle girl, indeed! Every well-beaten pathway for miles around is familiar to me. I know the Malgoozar, (or head-man) of every village, and many of the inhabitants of the knots of hovels scattered over the land. Perhaps "hovel" is too harsh a name for those snug and sunny mud abodes, with their thatched roofs covered with melons, their small patch of garden bright with marigolds, their gaudy scarlet doorways; outside of which, the lank red cat, the pariah puppy, and buffalo calf, lie snoozing inti-

mately in the noonday. Humble and poor as are these homes, they look clean, and bright, and cheerful. What though the mistress of the house labours daily as coolie, for the Biblical price of a sparrow ; and carries grain, earth, wood, or water on her head, with high-kilted saree and inimitable grace ; and the master spends his time in sitting aloft in a murga, *i.e.*, a large rude basket, raised on sticks, in a gram or jawarri field, clapping with his wooden clapper, and making the welkin ring with hideous shouts—in short, acting as scarecrow to the flocks of green parrots, who, perched in trees around, make bold raids upon the precious crops ; so do the solemn-faced, insolent monkeys ; so do the sambur ; so do the spotted deer. Still, when the stone-carrying and parrot-scaring are over for the day, many merry, talkative parties may be met, returning joyously to bake the immortal chupattie and to feast. Truly primitive are we in the jungle ! Our only clock is the sun ; and here may be seen two women grinding at the mill, women drawing water from a well, similar to the one frequented by Rebecca, and in these regions the ox (unmuzzled) still treadeth out the corn !

Within the last six months I had become the

possessor of a superb Arab, once destined for the Indian turf, but who, instead of leading a brilliant career at Bombay, Poona, or Hyderabad, had, thanks to father's tempting cheque, been consigned to the unappreciative jungle to carry *me*. "Cassim's" coat was like driven snow, without a speck of colour; he was not a washed-out, or flea-bitten gray, as are many of his kindred, but a dazzlingly white horse, whose small head and long silky mane testified to his high descent from the stables of the caliphs; and as I invariably wore a white habit, we were rather a conspicuous couple, and easily identified at a long distance. Each morning at sunrise, we set out to scour the neighbouring plains; so early were we, that we frequently met a hyena skulking to his lair, a belated jackal shuffling along to his shelter in the nullah, and the hungry crane flapping to his breakfast in the shallows. Lightly he cantered over perilous foot-tracks between flooded paddy fields; over cracked and sandy ground; under the walls of red-roofed villages of immemorial antiquity, whose inhabitants were as yet barely astir. But my favourite ride was to take a straight line across country, and strike into the great trunk road, that passed

ten miles from Paldi—a road that was the direct highway into the world I was so anxious to see. It was lined with huge Tamarind and Peepul trees, and looked like a long green ribbon, as it wound over the vast flats of waving crops or bare yellow plains, right into the town of Jubbulpore itself. Following this interesting route, I saw something of life on a small scale. I beheld hundreds of lumbering carts, laden with cotton and grain; tribes of chattering coolies; travellers riding small dejected-looking ponies, with gay bead necklaces and pitiably gaunt ribs; family parties on foot, the man carrying some light article—such as the baby—the woman heavily laden with the household goods and chattels; now a roaming musician, with a wind and water instrument, capable of terrible unearthly sounds; now a foul and frightful fakir; occasionally a wedding *cortège* would pass by, the little bridegroom borne aloft under a red satin canopy, generally in floods of tears—poor victim! he would rather be at home, in his own mud-walled courtyard, making “saumi” houses, or playing with the puppy, than being carried round the country like a little god!

For three or four miles, I would accompany

this tide that was setting from the jungle to the town, longing, but not daring, to go further than a certain bridge; and here I would reluctantly turn Cassim's head towards the sun, and gallop home to my bath and breakfast—and an inevitable scolding from Peggy. After breakfast I read, I worked, I copied out manuscript for father; in the afternoon I did my best to kill time, until he and I started for our ride or walk—*this* was the best part of the twenty-four hours in my opinion, especially when father was not in one of his silent moods; hand in hand we would ride together in the soft evening light and he would tell me stories, *bons mots*, and anecdotes; or better still, repeat whole cantos of “Marmion,” “Childe Harold,” “The Lady of the Lake.” He had a delightful voice, and a wonderful memory, and I taxed both remorselessly. I had favourite bits, that I encored again and again: Lord Byron's “Dream,” “Locksley Hall,” and scenes from “The Merchant of Venice,” “Othello,” and “Hamlet.” I know that I was insatiable and pitiless in my demands; but when it is borne in mind that among our considerable library we did not

boast of one novel, or one volume of poetry (save Watts' Hymns), my eager cry of "Please go on, oh, do not stop *yet*. More, more!" may perhaps be excused. We generally returned from our ride, or sail, just in time for dinner. After dinner, we played chess, and went to bed at an hour when many people were just sitting down to the principal function of the day. Such was my life, week after week, month after month; and the breaking of the monsoon, and the setting in of the hot weather, were the only great events that marked the years as they rolled slowly by! Most places, however humble, have some history, and our big stone Bungalow on the banks of the Karrhan was no exception to the rule. Tradition declared, that it had been built by "John Company" for one of their collectors from the ruins of an old Mahratta fort, and that numerous other bungalows were once its neighbours; moreover it was said, that the village of Burga—a mile down the river—had been formerly quite a flourishing and important town, and had actually boasted a market-place, a kotwal, a Dâk Bungalow, and a Catholic chapel! But time and trade had wrought changes; the col-

lector had been removed to a more central district ; Tappals, with heavy letter bags, ceased to come jingling by ; and pale, nankeen-clad clerks disappeared from the roads, which fell into mere bullock-tracks, the Bungalows (save one) into ruins, and the village of Burga, straightway back into heathendom, and the worship of Ram and Seeva ! These legends had foundations in every sense. Our dwelling had undoubtedly been the abode of some "Burra Sahib ;" the heavy old black wood furniture, the massive carvings about doors, and cornices, and punkah frames, the long range of stables, immense compound of many acres, and imposing avenue of gigantic Peepul trees, all pointed to the residence of a more important functionary than a mere clerk ! A tangle of brick and stone ruins, the remains of an old gateway, and the outline of a once imposing courtyard about a quarter of a mile away, indicated the site of the fort ; on the road to Burga, a few crazy gate piers, some ancient orange groves, and shapeless mounds of earth, testified to the site of the other Bungalows ; and almost hidden in a mango tope, with a bar across the entrance, to

keep out cattle and wild beasts, stood the little deserted chapel.

And Burga, also bore witness out of the mouth of its most venerable patriarch! He remembered when the chapel was crowded with worshippers, and he himself had knelt beside his mother, with her cloth over her head, whilst a white man in a black gown had preached to them in their native tongue; but this was long ago—oh, eighty years ago! Whatever Burga may have been in its palmy days, it was now nothing more than an ordinary mud village, clustering round a dilapidated fort, and fortified against marauding beasts by a formidable hedge of cactus. It was thickly populated by men, women, and children; droves of brown goats, black sheep, sacred pampered white cows, broken-hearted ponies, and ghostly pariah dogs. Many an evening, when father was from home, have I ridden to the top of a hill overlooking Burga—a hill conspicuous by its shrine and hideous scarlet idol—and there like a mounted sentry, or a white equestrian statue, I would remain for fully half-an-hour, as immovable as Cassim would permit. From my

post of observation I eagerly watched the crowds who swarmed and buzzed in the narrow alleys below me ; crowds who were gossiping, bargaining, backbiting, and flirting, much as they did in civilised capitals—had I but known it ! The various phases of life were similar to those elsewhere, in spite of the difference of climate, caste, and complexion. For instance, outside a low doorway, five old women are squatted, with their grey heads close together, their lean brown hands gesticulating, tearing to tatters the reputation of some absent friend, or discussing with ravenous appetite the latest village scandal. Prominent at yonder corner stands a bold-eyed beauty, with heavy gold ornaments on her arms, and a brass lotah poised jauntily on her hip—she is engaged in agreeable dalliance with a stalwart grain-dealer—a fact that has been noted by her mother-in-law, and our beauty will hear more about it by-and-by, when her husband returns from the plough. Behold that fat money-lender, who plays “spider” to those heedless flies, passing on his pony, and acknowledging the respectful salaams of his clients. See those youths gambling for a few annas, with agonised intent-

ness ; and, finally, note yonder urchin in a gaudy cap, and with an armful of sweets, followed by an obsequious retinue of affectionate young friends, and say if these have not their prototypes elsewhere?

As I gazed down upon the little world beneath me, my heart was no stranger to the pangs of envy! I would gladly have changed places with one of the crowd—just for an hour; especially with a certain pretty girl, in an orange saree (a native cloth), who was always surrounded by a little court of admirers, as she leant against the public well, *not* drawing water for the evening meal—her ostensible errand—but bantering a circle of ecstatic listeners!

“How did it feel to mix with other people? with other girls? to laugh and talk, and be a popular favourite? But what was the use of wondering and wishing?” I would ask myself dolefully—I would never know; and with this melancholy conviction uppermost in my mind, I would turn Cassim’s head down the hill, and ride slowly and sorrowfully, towards home and my solitary evening meal. It may seem inexplicable—worse still, positively disgraceful—that

an educated girl, of English parentage, could find attractions, in such a place as Burga, and envy the lot of a heathen beauty in an orange saree! But then, it must be charitably borne in mind, that that remote, miserable, mud village, with its primitive inhabitants, paltry little grain shops, and prowling pariah dogs, was the nearest approach to town, or society, that I had ever seen!

CHAPTER IV.

FINE FEATHERS.

“Yesterday for you, to-day for me.”

SANCHO PANZA.

A WHOLE month ! thirty long days ! had elapsed since the fortune-teller had made a diversion in my monotonous life, and so far not one single item of his predictions had been fulfilled—a fact that Peggy Magee did not permit me to forget. Father was still absent, for, as every sportsman is aware, the hot weather is the meridian of the Shikar season, when jungles are leafless, and rivers are low ; and as the hot weather was still in full blast, I was still alone, and growing hourly more discontented with my lot. The intense heat, the lack of companionship, and a naturally restless and enterprising disposition, made me “a blister

and a heart-scald, to all who had to do with me," according to Peggy Magee. One thing was very certain; it would not be *her* fault, if I ever developed into a young woman with an exalted opinion of myself. One breathless, blazing afternoon I sat alone in the darkened drawing-room, gazing out on the fiery glare before me—the ground burnt to a brick colour, the atmosphere quivering with a yellow haze of heat—at the drooping trees with withered leaves and shrivelled seed-pods, the thirsty dusty plants, and still more thirsty birds—crows, sparrows and minars—who were sheltering in the verandah, with their miserable beaks agape.

Such was the prospect out of doors, and for fully two hours longer the sun was master of the situation; I dared not face him till he was well down upon his way into the red west. Indoors, my resources were at a very low ebb: it was far too hot to sew, I had no light fancy-work, no drawing materials, no piano, no novels, no letters to write—absolutely nothing to do, except to grapple with the "History of the Reformation," and to get up my task, like a good little girl! But I was not at all in an industrious frame

of mind, my brain was in a torpid condition, and all my spare energies were devoted to parrying and slaying the clouds of ferocious mosquitoes, who were literally thirsting for my blood! There I sat, like one in a trance, dimly conscious of the roar of the hot wind outside, and making occasional languid passes at my insect foes. Suddenly the old clock behind me underwent some violent internal convulsion, and clanged out "one, two, three, four," and I rose, stretched myself, yawned extravagantly, and resolved to restore animation, by a good long talk—or quite possibly an animated argument—with Peggy. Having this laudable object in view, I passed into the dining-room and sought her in her own particular sanctum; the sanctum was vacant, an empty cup, the little hard-worked tea-pot, and her beads, were on the table; for what mysterious rite, or heavy task had Peggy Magee thus recently fortified herself? She was not to be found on her usual battle-field, the back verandah; nor yet in the lamp room, or Maty's pantry. At last I discovered her, in a distant apartment, known as "the office," and chiefly used for the storage of grain, oil, newspapers, and father's old boots.

It was a part of the house that I rarely entered; but now, seeing the door ajar, I pushed it back, and to my great astonishment beheld Peggy, her dress carefully turned up, a handkerchief pinned over her cap, kneeling in front of a large open bullock trunk! Spread around her on sheets on the floor were—could I believe my eyes?—many articles of gorgeous apparel. I saw a pink satin garment, a magnificent vision, of gold embroidery, an “arrangement” in blue and silver, that shamed the evening sky; also flowers, fans, feathers, slippers, in short I beheld “Dress” for the first time in my life, and, with the bound of an antelope, I was in the midst of these treasures.

“I declare to goodness, Miss Ranee! I wish you would not be giving me these turns,” cried Peggy, irritably. “Prancing in like a wild goat! What ails ye? What do ye want now?” spreading out her arms over the box—as if she feared a raid on its contents, then, and there.

“I only want to hear the sound of my own voice,” I replied, dropping on my knees beside her as I spoke.

“Augh! There’s no fear of your not hearing

plenty of *that*—'tis the music ye like best in the world. But run away now, like a good child, and amuse yourself."

I need scarcely remark that I had not the smallest intention of complying with this polite request. Firstly, because I was tired of my own company. Secondly, because I saw the means of ample amusement before me. Thirdly, because I am certain that Peggy has some *private* and *mysterious* reason for wishing to be rid of me—and this latter conviction is alone sufficient to nail me to the spot.

"Do you hear me, honey?" reiterated my companion peevishly. "I don't want ye."

"Nonsense, Peg," I retorted. "You know you always want me, so don't say what you don't mean."

"Well, any way, I can spare you now, darlin'. I have a few small things to redd up. Can't ye go out? Ye have not been beyond the place this three days; the house will grow on you, and there's your white horse just leppin' out of his skin!"

"Let him lepp," I rejoined contemptuously. "It's too hot to ride, this broiling day."

"Well," persisted Peggy, hastily concealing the glories of various things from my eager eyes, "ye might take the panther for a walk, or go and play with the two little bears, like a good girl."

"The bears indeed!" I echoed indignantly. "Horrid little wretches! They are learning the use of their claws; and just look at my arms, with scratches. Now that they can take care of themselves, I'll have them turned loose to get their own living."

"Is it the bears!—to sport and poach over the whole place? I'd sooner drown them with my own two hands. Well, dearie, and what are you waiting for?"

"Why, to help you to unpack, of course," was my ready reply, as I plunged both arms elbow-deep into the trunk in front of me. "Oh, I never, never saw such lovely things," not doubting that this delightful box had been despatched to me by father as "a surprise," similar to my new habit and saddle last Christmas. "Just look at this," I continued, dragging out a gorgeous crimson and gold opera cloak, and throwing it over my shoulders; "and this," snatching up a large red

feather fan. Thus equipped, I commenced to pace the room in what I flattered myself was the true fine-lady fashion, smiling and fanning myself, and nodding coquettishly at Peggy, who still remained kneeling on the floor, her hands on her hips, her mouth wide open—but speechless.

“Well, how do I look?” I inquired conceitedly. “Do these fine feathers become me?”

But Peggy still continued to stare at me with a kind of basilisk gaze. Then she suddenly buried her face in her apron, and exclaimed in a strange, choked voice:

“Oh, for God’s sake, *don’t*, Miss Ranee!—You are just her living image.”

As I paused, and confronted her in blank dismay, she removed her apron from her eyes and said, with passionate vehemence:

“Take them off, core of me heart! Take them off!”

“Why, what do you mean?” I stammered out, rather frightened at her strange manner and the storm I had unwittingly raised. “Are these things not for *me*? When did they come here?”

“They came when *we* came; in or about seventeen year ago. Will that please you?”

"Then, then," speaking with an effort, "they are not new, they must have been my *mother's*," bringing out that unfamiliar name, with some hesitation.

"Yes," replied Peggy, "and many a time I put that same cloak over her shoulders, and elegantly it became her."

I felt that to wear it thus, gaily masquerading about the room, was nothing less than sacrilege; and, slowly removing it, I folded it up with much care. I stood for some seconds in silence; then, acting under a sudden impulse, flung myself on my knees beside Peggy, and, throwing my arm round her neck, said:

"Peggy Magee! tell me a great deal about my mother!"

"And what can I tell ye, but what ye know already?" said Peggy, struggling to release herself. "Sure isn't she dead this seventeen year, and what good will it do you, darlin,' or her ayther, to be going back over that? Ye don't remember her, av coorse?"

"Not in the least. How old was I when I lost her?"

"Ye were in or about a twelvemonth old."

"And she was quite young?"

"Barely wan and twenty."

"Not very much older than I am myself," I remarked thoughtfully. "What was she like?"

"Oh, just beautiful!"

"Then, Peggy," I said, bending eagerly towards her, and looking at her searchingly, "since you say that I am *like* her—tell me the truth—it can do no harm, here in the jungle—am *I* beautiful?"

"Oh faix," greatly nonplussed, and hastily wiping her face. "There does be likenesses. There's many a time a terrible resemblance between two people, and wan is handsome, and the other is *not*! Now there was me, and me cousin Kate—for I never had no sister but meeself—and she was as fine a girl as you would see, with curly hair, and a clear skin, and we were often mislaid for one another, though I was as black as a crow. It's the same with *you*."

"Only I am not as black as a crow," I retorted sharply. "And that is no answer to my question, Peggy Magee," bringing my face close to hers as I spoke. "*Am* I pretty? If you do not tell me the truth, I shall complain to Father Paul, and he will make you do penance."

"As if the holy man would mind you, and your looks!" she answered, giving me an indignant push. "A pretty face is the devil's trap. And you are just as the Lord made you! as I've told you a hundred and wan times."

"Yes, so you have," I acquiesced with a sigh; "and I don't suppose my looks matter one single straw. But, dear, nice, handsome Peggy, I won't ask you any more questions about myself, if you will only tell me about my mother; father never speaks of her. Was he very fond of her?"

"He just worshipped the sole of her shoe," replied Peggy, illustrating the remark with a dainty little slipper.

"And when she died so young and pretty, he must have been in great grief. Was he not?"

"He was just like a madman, no more and no less!"

"Poor father! No wonder he is grave and silent."

"No wonder at *all*, me darlin'."

"Why have I never seen these things before?"

"Because they were put away designedly on purpose, behind the flour chest; and more betoken ye have no call to see them *now*. The master

would be just *raging* if he knew ! He would think these things were putting notions of dress and finery into your head. I am just raking through them, to see if there's anything tame enough to cut up for you, for you are getting past them white cottons, and as grown up as you'll ever be !”

“As grown up as you are, Peg.”

“An' don't talk of *me*, my heart ; sure, an old woman only grows down, like a cow's tail.”

“Peggy,” I inquired, after a long and reflective silence. “Do you think we shall ever leave this?”

“My darling child !” she rejoined ; “and don't I pray for it night and morning, on me bended knees. And haven't I given pounds, and pounds, of candles over it to the chapel at Kolar ? I'd die off at wance, if I thought I'd never see Howth Hill again, or get the taste of a Bay herring, foreby laying me four bones in holy Glasnevin. I've often had it in me mind to ax the masther, but when it came to the pinch, the heart failed me ; he is a stern man, and has quare notions.”

“Notions about what ?” I asked eagerly.

"Well, about *you*, for wan. Look at your edecation, Latin and figures, and books full of close print, like a boy ; and riding and shooting, as bold as any young man."

"Yes ; and any more notions ?"

"And *plenty*," rejoined Peggy, with much emphasis. "He thinks to bring you up above the world, like a spring of water on the top of a mountain, with nothing but the stars between you and heaven ; but, as I says to Father Paul, you can't go against Providence ; and if a girl's to *be* married, she'll *be* married, even if she was locked in a box, at the bottom of a lake, like St. Patrick's Serpent !"

"Yes ; but I don't want to be married," I exclaimed impatiently ; "I only wish to see other places, and people that I have read about. I want to see the World."

"There ye go, with the old cry," said Peggy, angrily. "The world is an awful, bad place ; as I've often told you. Ye are best where you are."

"That's all very fine for *you* to say, Peggy," I rejoined peevishly. "You have had your day, now I want to have *mine*."

"And sure, and aren't you having a beautiful one?" she demanded, in her shrillest key; "not a care, or a want on earth! A splendid house, a grand garden, horses to ride, servants to wait on ye, your father just wrapped up in you, and me, that would give me heart's blood for you. What more do ye want?"

Certainly, from this point of view, it seemed impossible—and not merely impossible, but abominably ungrateful—to wish for any change; and I was silent; but it was not in my nature to be mute for long, and presently I exclaimed:

"Peggy, I often wonder why *you* stay here?"

"There's more nor *you* does that, Honey. Mary Flannigan, at the 'Mission,' is fairly lost over it."

"You have no change, except to Kolar," I continued; "and one hundred miles in a bullock-cart *can't* be pleasure."

"In truth, an' it is *not*," she replied emphatically. "Them journeys, and joltings, has aged me wonderfully; but, you see, I go for my duties, and the sake of my soul; it's not pleasure I am looking for, at my time of life."

"But surely you had *some*, when you were young?"

"Well, maybe I had—I'll tell no lie about it, for a lie is sinful. I believe I had fine times, when I was in a good place in Baggot Street, and Jim Magee was courting me! Jim was as smart a boy as ever wore a red coat on his back, and a cap on his ear."

"And *how* did he court you?" I inquired, with redoubled interest.

"Oh, well; when I'd be sent to the pillar with a letter, he was frequently convanient to the corner, and we had a word, and a joke—and there was me Sunday out! However, I made a bad hand of meself when I married a lance-corporal—and all me people were black against it; when I followed Jim over the says to this heathen country.—Oh wirra, wirra! and little I guessed the road I was going!"

"But why do you stay, Peg?"

"Well, dearie, at first it was the gratitude got hold of me. I had terrible times, when Jimmy went on the drink, and lost his stripe; and only for the Captain's lady, I'd have been wanting bread, or a tack of clothes. Jimmy was awful,

when he had the cross drop, and he would never *allow* he was drunk; he always swore 'twas a wakeness of the legs came over him. Signs on it, there was no wakeness in his *arm*! Ah well, I've no call to be going back over that.—Jimmy died, and then me baby was took; and your father, a civil doctor, in elegant practice, fetched me home——”

“For what?”

“Why, as nurse for you, and what else? You were only four days old. And he gave me me black, and a headstone for Jimmy, and everything of the first quality; and I stayed where I was well off, instead of going home to be jeered at for marrying a soldier. The people always said I'd come to want and the wash-tub, and sooner than let them crow over me I vowed to meself I'd die out here. Oh, I'm *proud*, though maybe you never guessed it, Miss Ranee.”

“Well, Peggy, go on,” I urged.

“It was at Agra we were in those days, a town with a real Irish name, and fine gardens, and a beautiful chapel to some heathen queen. Och! them was the gay times for races and balls! Your mother loved a ball, and was just

like a feather on the floor. And I had hapes of offers; but *once*, as I said to them all, was more than enough for Peggy Magee, Well then, when trouble came, your father broke up house and moved here, and I came, too; first, for the grand pay and lucre, that was making a lady of me; and then you grew on me, ye poor little motherless crature; and I stopped from months to years, for I felt that it would be dragging the heart out of me, to lave you." Here Peggy drew her hand hastily across her eyes; but, before I had time to speak, she was herself again, and, briskly shaking out a pink satin skirt, exclaimed: "See that now?"

"What is it, Peg?" I asked impressively.

"Why, a ball-dress," she replied; "an' what else?"

"How lovely!" I ejaculated. "But, Peggy, where is the body? *What!* that little narrow thing, without neck or sleeves? Do people really——"

"And to be *sure* they do," she interrupted. "Why, no one, not even the rale old wans, goes to a ball in a high gown."

"Well, I never knew that before," I answered

meekly. "At any rate, it must be delightfully cool! It is certainly a beautiful dress," surveying it with grave admiration. Hitherto, Peggy's veteran black silk had been my "ne plus ultra" of splendour. What though it lagged twenty years behind the fashion, since I had never heard of that rigid institution.

"Here's a white satin," continued Peggy, "the fellow of it, only it's as yallow now as a duck's foot; and here's a rale grand thing," unfolding, as she spoke, a red and blue bundle, with much jingling of bells. "T'was in this she went to the Governor's ball," shaking it vigorously, till every little clapper tinkled.

"And what *is* it?" I cried, seizing on it eagerly. "Why!" holding it at my waist, "just look! it would only come a little below my knees! Peggy Magee, how *dare* you tell me that my mother ever wore this! Just look for yourself, and see how short it is," I demanded, indignantly.

"Oh, short enough!" admitted Peggy with a rather nervous cough. "But you are tall, very tall. She went as Folly, there's the cap and bells."

"Folly, what does it mean?"

"Folly just means a gay young female fool; and faix there does be many, needs no change of dress, nor bells, nor caps, to call themselves *that*," she returned emphatically; hurriedly rolling up the costume as she spoke.

"What pretty little red shoes!" I exclaimed, picking up a pair. "I wonder if they would fit me?"

Peggy took no notice, but went on folding up, and putting by, one thing after another; nothing tame, nothing capable of "cutting up" for me, had been forthcoming. I sat down on a box, and tried on the slippers. They fitted me exactly; never had I seen my feet look to such advantage.

"May I keep them, Peg?" I asked in my most wheedling voice, "not to wear, never to wear; but just because they were my mother's. It's very hard if I may not have something of hers, even this little old pair of shoes!"

For an answer Peggy reached over, stripped them one after the other off my reluctant feet, threw them in on the top of the box, closed it,

locked it, and finally sat down on the lid, as if completely exhausted with her labours.

"That's too bad of you!" I remonstrated, nearly crying. "Why may I not have the little shoes?"

"I dare not give them, nor lay a finger on one of these things. Your father is very jealous of them, and no one is to touch them, or look at them."

"And yet *you* were going to take a whole dress out of it for me?" I retorted with angry sarcasm.

"Something he would never miss—he'd know them slippers; she had a foot like——" then she stopped abruptly and said, "Who's that bothering at the door?"

"Oh, the letters; no, the letters is newspapers."

"Yes," I answered, running to take them; "two for John Barrington, and one for Mrs. Margaret Magee."

"And no line from the masther! well, that's strange; as there's only himself in it, it makes me anxious! What good is them two native Shikarris, that would let a gun run through their

hands like melted butter, if they saw a tiger, and them tigers is desperate peevish brutes by all accounts. I am always in dread for fear one of them would give him a clip of its paw, and stretch him, ay, and maybe ate him too!"

"Nonsense, Peg. Father is much too good a shot and too experienced ever to run any risks. Who is your paper from?"

"Mee brother the car-driver! I know his fine black writing. He is not like me; I never could round on the letters, and the pen always gets the upper hand of me."

"But you can't read, Peggy!"

"Only small words, darlin'. You see it takes a person to know grammar, and I never had no grammar."

I stared blankly at Peggy, vainly trying to make some sense of this extraordinary speech, and she continued:

"I'll get you to read me a spell by-and-by. I'm fond of an air of the paper."

"Yes," I answered, "but you know father only allows me to read the debates."

"Oh, the speeches! them's too dry entirely, and you are old enough now for robberies, and

railway accidents, and all that! After dinner, when the house is quiet, I'll get you to read me a good murder!"

"Peggy!" I ejaculated. "How *can* you be so blood-thirsty?"

"Is it *me* blood-thirsty!" she echoed in her shrillest key, "*me*, that could never kill a chicken! But murders is good reading, being a warning and example with regard to the hangings. Now mind, dearie, you never let on to the master about this box; if he knew you were meddling with it, we would just have to tie the roof on the house! Come away now; I am going to draw myself a cup of tea!"

Meanwhile, as I rose, I caught sight of an article Peggy had overlooked, a small green morocco book lying on the floor. I pounced on it at once.

"Look here; see what you have forgotten," I cried, opening it as I spoke, and reading aloud: "'Poems by Thomas Moore. Marion Saunders—1865.' Now, Peg—*dear* Peg," throwing my arms round her neck as I spoke, "surely I may keep *this*; where can be the harm? Do—*do* let me have it!"

Peggy never could withstand my caresses, and between them and a strong disinclination to open the box, she gave in, but with anything but a good grace.

“Well, since you are so set, I suppose you must have it. Show!” turning over the leaves rather suspiciously. “It’s empty—well—take it; but if ever your father lays eyes on it, he’ll just put me outside the door; so mind *that*.”

“Very well; I promise that he shall never see it,” I returned, most fervently. “Peg, you are an old duck!” And with a glow of satisfaction at having carried my point, and at the same time a guilty sense of possessing my first *secret*, I took myself off, along with my new treasure, in order that I might examine it at leisure in the privacy of my own chamber.

CHAPTER V.

REBELLION.

“The same sick gaze on the same lack
Of lustre in the level gray.
It seems but yesterday come back
With nothing new—and not to-day.”
OWEN MEREDITH.

ONCE alone, I inspected my prize far more thoroughly, than I had done under Peggy's little sharp dark eyes. I hoped that I might discover some scrap of my mother's writing, some pencilled note, that would bring me nearer to her, and bridge the great chasm of years and unreality that lay between us.—In my secret heart I worshipped the memory of my young mother, whom I had never seen. Oh that I could recall her face, however dimly! But alas, the past, so far as it concerned her, was a blank! Reverently, as if

it were some sacred relic, I turned over the leaves of the volume in my hand, and between two of them—stuck in as a kind of marker—was a little white and gold card, which puzzled me sorely for a long time. I made out at last that it was a list of names at a ball; people's names were scribbled opposite the dances—there were twenty in all. My mother had danced every one! No wonder Peggy had said she was fond of balls. I pored over this little programme for a long time, studying every letter, every line, every pencil mark. The date of the dance was nearly seventeen years previously, when I was quite a baby. I wondered if I had been brought to look at her in all her finery. I wondered, if she had come and kissed me in my cot before she started. Then I went over to the looking-glass, and stared at myself intently as I repeated Peggy's speech of that afternoon, "Her very image!" Only of course her face was not as thin and white as mine, for mine was almost colourless, owing to my having spent my life on the plains.

Certainly the reflection before me had but slender claims to beauty—a small, sharp, white face—and oh, such large, eager-looking, hazel eyes.

I declare as I looked into my own eyes, they quite frightened me, they had such an earnest, searching gaze, as if they knew nothing, and wanted to know everything. Their expression was so grave and so piercing, that I could hardly believe they belonged to me. It seemed as if some imprisoned spirit was gazing out of them—the weird and crazy fancy of a foolish girl, brought up in the wilderness! My brows were dark and straight; my hair—my sole beauty—immensely long and thick, came to my knees; even Peggy was proud of it, and I myself loved to pull it all down and let it envelop me like a pale yellow mantle. As I was thus engaged in minutely examining my features, I heard Peggy singing in the passage; her singing was rather monotonous, for she sang continually, and never varied her song:

“It’s a sorrowful ditty
I’ll sing to you now;
It’s about an old man
Who had but one cow.”

“He—— And it’s there you are, figuring before the glass,” she cried, pausing in the doorway. “Did I ever see such concate! Such *wicked* concate! So much for letting you get

the taste of dress and finery! *I* knew how it would be."

"It's not 'concate,' as you call it," I retorted indignantly; "and it's nonsense to fancy that looking at a pink satin dress would make me what you call wicked, all at once."

"Then what are you up to?" she asked imperiously.

I hesitated, and then replied :

"I wanted, by looking at my own face, to try and imagine what my mother was like."

"Was like! Oh, then heaven send you sense! One would think you were short of a day in the week. There, have done with such folly, and whip on your habit. Your horse is tearing about outside, and Laloo is hard set to hold him to the ground."

Thus hustled by Peggy, I hurried into my habit, and was soon in the saddle, and taking my usual solitary gallop across the plains, over tracts of delightful wilderness, which no plough had ever touched.

A few days after this eventful afternoon, father returned in an unusually cheerful humour, and

laden with spoils of the chase. His bag consisted of four tigers, a leopard, two bison, sambur, cheetul, and black buck ; and other small fry too numerous to mention. What a bustle there was ! Coolies, and Shikarris, and country carts were very much in the foreground. Stacks of horns lay on the burnt-up grass, and several recently shot (and rather odoriferous) skins, were pegged out to dry. Certainly a man makes a wonderful difference in a house. Father's tramping boots and loud voice were a welcome change to the silence and repose of the bungalow, with only Peggy and I for its tenants, and our decorous tribe of cat-footed servants. Father proudly displayed all his booty, and then walked round the stables and the garden with me, narrating his adventures in brief, pithy sentences. I, on my side, unfolded my scanty budget of domestic news. The brown Arab was lame ; the Dhoby's son had small-pox ; and the Karrhan river was lower than it had been for twenty years. N.B.—I omitted to mention the fortune-teller's visit, or my delightful discoveries in the old bullock trunk !

After dinner, we adjourned, as usual, to the drawing-room, a large, white-washed apart-

ment, carpeted with tiger skins, furnished with heavy old black carved furniture and two enormous punkahs. The only decorations it could boast were a couple of hideous scriptural pictures in wool-work, that had fallen to Peggy in a religious raffle, and which father's politeness had compelled him to accept. Father and I sat opposite to one another at a large round table, he deeply absorbed in a newspaper, and a political crisis that had occurred four months previously ; I, darning my thoughts into a sock in my hand, and vainly trying to stifle my yawns, vainly indeed ; they were not merely loud, but infectious ; and much to my delight, father laid down his paper, and desired me to get out the chessboard ; a request that I obeyed with the greatest alacrity. As I paused and meditated over the moves, I was conscious that father's eyes were now and then rivetted on me, with unusual intentness ; once I met them point-blank, and he was surprised into saying :

“ Yes ; I am looking at you in wonder, Ranee ! Living with you, day after day, I saw no change in you ; you seemed to be still a little girl ; now, a short absence ”—did he call three months

a short absence?—"has opened my eyes. I realise that you are grown up. How old are you?"

"I shall be nineteen next birthday."

"Nineteen," he echoed incredulously.

"Yes, I was eighteen six weeks ago."

"And are still eighteen. You won't be so anxious to put the clock on in ten years' time. Well, we must celebrate your birthday, your arrival at years of discretion—or indiscretion—in some fashion. What would you like to do?"

I laid down the pawn in my hand, I gazed reflectively at the lamp; there were so many things that I would "like to do." I would like to go to Europe, or even to Bombay; I would like to visit Delhi, Agra, Cashmere; but what was the use of indulging in castles in the air? I, who wanted so many things, that were only names to me; at last I blurted out:

"Next time Peggy goes to Kolar I should like to go with her."

"For what?" inquired my father, very sternly.

(How lucky it was that I had said nothing of *Bombay*!)

"To see it, to see the world," I faltered timidly.

"There is a railway station, a chapel, and a shop."

"The station is a shed, the chapel a barn, and the shop, a musty store, reeking with bad cheese and kerosine oil; much better come out into tents for a week and study Nature."

"But I am so *sick* of Nature! I know it all so well: parched plains, dry rivers, leafless trees in the hot weather; green plains, splendid foliage, torrents—and snakes, in the rains."

"Anything is better than that hole, Kolar."

"Still I should like to *see* it; I am so ignorant of common things," I grumbled bravely.

"You are an unusually well-educated girl; you are a fair Latin and French scholar, well read in English literature, and no contemptible mathematician—and that reminds me to ask if you have read 'D'Aubigny's History' and Motley's 'Dutch Republic?'"

"I tried to read them," I answered. "The 'Republic' I did wade through; but as for the other, I found it too dry, nearly as dry as the 'Karrhan,' so I threw it into what remains of the river. I *did*," I reiterated defiantly. "The

crocodiles have eaten it long ago ; I hope *they* were able to digest it, for it was beyond *me*."

"You threw the—book—into the river," repeated father slowly, as if scarcely believing his ears.

"Yes," I rejoined quite boldly, and now blazing into open rebellion. "After all, what is the use of learning to me, to whom so many things are empty names?" And then I leant my elbows on the table, and met father's look of utter amazement, with a counter glance of angry defiance. The accumulated broodings of the last three months were boiling in my brain, and the memory of endless, idle, weary days spurred my courage into passion.

"What is the use of it all?" I demanded excitedly. "It is like describing scenery to a person who was born blind. I have never seen a ship, or a church, or a painting. I have never heard any music but the village tom-toms, or seen any work of art except an idol. I have never spoken to a lady since I was born. I am sick of this life." Here I paused, half choked by the fluttering of my heart, and nearly breathless with emotion, and in conclusion jerked out

my usual parrot cry: "I want to see the world!"

"You won't see much of it at Kolar," rejoined father with unexpected composure; but he looked both grieved and astounded. "The less you mix in it the better. I lived in it for thirty years, and found that all is vanity. Friendship is nought. Love is nought. Fame is nought. But what is the use of talking to you? Like all the innocent and young, you believe it will be different for you—your life will surely be sunny—it could not be otherwise—if I will only open the cage door and let you fly away."

"Oh, father!" I expostulated in a milder key. "Home is not a prison. If I did fly away, I would come back."

"Well, at any rate, you are tired of home *now*," he went on sharply.

This was quite true, and my eyes sank before his with a sense of guilt.

"Perhaps you would not believe it. Nevertheless, the day may come when you will look back upon your present existence as a thirsty traveller in a scorching desert recalls some cool oasis he has rashly quitted. Here, if you have

no friends, you have no enemies; if you have no society, you have no slander; if you have no lovers, you have no heart-burnings and no tears."

"Lovers!" I echoed indignantly. "I never thought of lovers. I should hate them."

Father took no notice of this rash statement, but sat silent for some seconds with a harassed look upon his face, whilst I waited in some trepidation for him to speak.

"I see, you are disgusted with this simple life. You are tired of your books, verses, flowers, and pets. Had I the eloquence of Burke, I would be only wasting my breath in trying to convince you that *this* is the happiest existence. Your young nature, full of hope, and life, and energy, craves a change. You cannot help yourself." Then he muttered in a lower voice, as if speaking to himself: "It is in the blood." Another pause, and he continued: "My dear-bought experience is a battered, second-hand article, and of no use to any one but myself. I have known and feared that this day would come, Rane. I have shut my eyes to the fact that you are no longer a child, when a doll and a pony ful-

filled all your aspirations. I have been like an ostrich, hiding my head in the sand, and like that infatuated bird, I have been a *fool*."

As he concluded, his voice sank almost to a whisper, his eyes looked strangely misty. My heart was ever easily touched, and it now felt a pang as if a sword had pierced it. My passion, quickly kindled, was as quickly extinguished. "Oh what a wicked, unhappy, ungrateful girl I was!" Resting my arms on the table, and laying my head in them, I burst into a storm of tears.

My tears were rarely, rarely seen, and father was greatly shocked, I have no doubt. He did not know what to do with me. At last he rose slowly, and came over and laid his hand on my shoulder and said :

"Diana, my dear, I cannot stand this. You shall do with your life as you like. Your happiness is my happiness. I am a blighted man. All is over as far as *I* am concerned myself. I shall live and die here ; but *you* shall see the world. I have a sister at home. You shall go to her—you shall——"

"What ! and leave you alone, father ?" I

interrupted between my sobs. "No — never. Do not mind what I said. I was in a rage about nothing.— I was tired and cross. It is only when you are away that I am so wretched. When you are at home I want no one but *you*."

"Is this true?" he inquired, putting his hand under my chin and raising my tear-stained face to his. "But I need not ask. Your lips have never learned how to make pretty, false speeches.—Thank God you don't know *how* to tell a lie. You mean what you say."

"Yes, father; I will stay with you always," I answered, drawing a long quivering breath; "but won't you talk to me a little more?"

"Talk to you! Don't I talk to you?" he echoed in astonishment.

"Very little, and you never laugh."

"Well, I must try and mend my ways. I am a selfish old hermit, and a dull companion. I have forgotten how to laugh, but I will grin—I will reform. Yes, my poor little girl, I will never leave you by yourself again, to be devoured by that lion, 'ennui.' Remember that you are all I have, Ranee, and if you go into the world, I lose you."

I raised my brimming eyes to his, and faltered out:

"Father, I will never leave you, as long as I live—unless you send me away," I added, with a sickly smile.

"And that I will never do," was his emphatic reply, as he stooped and gravely kissed me.

Thus I, Diana Barrington, vowed myself to the jungle for life, and thus the only "scene" which had ever taken place between us, came to a harmonious conclusion. But when I had cleared away the unfinished game of chess, and gone to bed, I heard father pacing the drawing-room, for more than an hour—a sure sign that he was working out some serious mental problem.

CHAPTER VI.

“THE BEGUM’S NECKLACE.”

“What precious drops are these,
Which silently each other’s track pursue?”

DRYDEN.

A FEW evenings, after this memorable conversation, father came into the drawing-room, carrying a candle in one hand, and a curious Indian box in the other.

“Look at this, Ranee,” he said, holding out the latter, “and tell me what you think of its contents.”

I seized it promptly—still standing by the centre table, on which stood a large Argand lamp. It was a narrow case, covered with faded Indian silk, fastened by massive silver clasps, and when opened it emitted a faint perfume of otto

of roses. I took out a roll of chamois leather, that fitted it tightly, then came cotton wool. I raised the wool, and gave an involuntary scream. Large bright things, like drops of water, strung together, lay before me. They flashed in the light like fire-flies and dew. Never, never, had I seen, or dreamt, of anything like what was beneath my dazzled eyes! A thick necklace, with heavy pendants, and all made of these bright stones!

"What are they?" I asked, almost in a whisper.

"They are diamonds—diamonds of the first water."

"And for me?"

"Yes; but they are not much use to you, except to look at. They are worth a large sum of money—there are not many such necklaces to be seen."

"And when did you get it?" I asked, fingering it timidly.

"It was given to me by a native Prince. You see," spreading it out, "it is quite an Eastern design. This thick collar of brilliants, four deep, for the throatlet, and then the large pendants with big stones. An English jeweller would

have got the same effect, with half the material, and half the expense."

"But surely not such a blaze of light?" I said, holding up the heavy necklace, which sparkled and flashed, till it made my eyes blink—the diamonds were rudely cut, but large and flawless, and from the centre of the necklet hung a pendant containing one remarkable stone, that flung forth a lurid flame, that almost dimmed its satellites.

"Put it on," said father, taking it from me; and clasping it round my neck, he surveyed me critically.

"How do I look?" I asked—my vain, invariable query.

"Oh, as to that, every one looks well in diamonds; including, no doubt, the dusky-skinned lady, for whom this ornament was originally made," was his somewhat damping rejoinder.

"And how did you come by it?" I inquired curiously.

A strange expression passed over his face, and for a moment he made no reply, then he said with a short laugh:

“Do you think I stole it, or got it by bribery and corruption? You know I was a doctor long ago?”

“Yes, father,” I answered in a low voice.

“A civil doctor in large practice. I frequently attended native noblemen, who gave me enormous fees—certainly not like *this*,” touching my necklace. “The Rajah of Odore had but one son—he was at the point of death, and I performed a very difficult operation on him, and under Providence saved his life; and his father in his gratitude insisted on giving me this bauble. He forced it on me, asking if I thought he could ever repay me? His wife was dead—he did not care for jewels—he was rich, and he valued his son’s life far beyond a few bright stones. He was so determined that I should take them, that he said if I did not accept them, he would throw them into the Ganges then and there.—So I took them, and when I had received his magnificent gift, and thanked him, he said rather mysteriously: ‘Do not thank me *too* much. I am glad to be rid of the jewels, thus honourably. It has ever

been an unlucky necklace. May it bring *you* nothing but good fortune!"

"An unlucky necklace! What did he mean?" I asked anxiously.

"I had the curiosity to inquire; and he told me, that it was of immense antiquity, and, once upon a time, the cause of violent quarrels in a Zenana. A legend said, that one woman had strangled another with it, and that the wearer cursed her murderess and the necklace, with her last breath."

"This necklace that I have on now!" I almost shrieked, hastily unclasping it. It was very heavy, and it slipped between my trembling fingers, and fell with a clang and a flash upon the table.

"It is only an Indian legend, Ranee," said father, contemptuously, "and you know what that is worth. Surely you are not superstitious—most precious stones have a history."

"And what else did you hear?" I asked evasively.

"I heard that it belonged to one of the Begums of Oude, in the days of Warren Hastings.

She was implicated in the rebellion of Cheit Singh, and was imprisoned by the Nawab Vizier, and plundered of it, and all her other treasures. It passed through many hands, till it came to be part of the loot of Delhi ; a drunken soldier found it, and, taking it for glass, sold it for a few rupees to a native jeweller, who subsequently disposed of it to my Rajah, who doubtless got it *cheap*. He said that the centre stone of the pendant was all but matchless. But it has rather an uncanny name ; it is called the ‘ Evil Eye,’ ” concluded father, with a smile to which I could not possibly respond.

“ Then I am sure I shall not like this necklace—I feel quite afraid of it already,” I remarked rather nervously. “ I would rather not have anything to say to it—please take it back.”

“ Pooh ! Don’t be childish ; don’t talk nonsense. Go away and look at yourself in the glass, and come back here again, and *then* tell me if you are *afraid* of it ! ”

So I gathered up the Begum’s necklace without further protest, went away to my own room, lit two candles, and gazed at myself exhaustively !

My neck and throat looked one blaze of diamonds, I could not take my eyes off my own reflection. Afraid of the necklace? No, I had never seen anything so splendid in all my life; plundered Begums, and strangled women, were swept out of my mind, by this vision of blinding brilliancy. My neck seemed encircled by a band of fire, as I turned my head from side to side, trying to catch each new scintillation with the glee of a child.

"So you are there at the glass again!" said a voice that made me jump, and turning I beheld Peggy.

"Oh, my gracious!" she ejaculated. "And you have on the Begum's necklace. What are you doing with it, Miss Ranee?"

"Admiring it, Peggy," I answered, with a toss of my fair locks. "It is not the Begum's any longer. It is *mine*!"

"Oh, and has he given you *that*? Well, he gave you a nice present when he went about it. It's an unlucky article, if all tales be true, and works terrible things, for them that owns it."

"Now, Peggy," I cried, instantly in arms to do battle for my treasure. "How can you talk such nonsense?"—precisely what father had recently said to *me*—"you, who are always despising the poor, superstitious heathen. How can there be any harm in senseless bits of stone? Just ask yourself!"

"Well," rejoined Peggy doggedly. "Me mind misgives me all the same. That middle bead has a wicked dazzle in it, as if it was just daring you not to wink at it! Any way, I'll keep them for you, my heart, and lock them away with the plate, safe and sound."

"Indeed no, thank you very much, Peggy. I'll keep them myself, and I know *all* about this bead, as you call it; it is named the Evil Eye."

"An' I would not doubt it! Well, eye or no eye, mind that you can't be wearing them jewels, unless you want to have us all murdered in our beds. Ye can see the flash of them like the Kish light, and blazing diamonds is as dangerous in a house as a barrel of gunpowder. What in the world put it into the mather's head to go

and give you such a thing?" she concluded irritably.

"He gave it to me to please me," I returned loftily. "The usual reason for making presents, and also as a reward for promising to be contented here always, and to say no more about wanting to see the world."

"He stops your mouth with diamonds, to keep you from craving and clamouring; to live easy at home!" cried Mrs. Magee, raising her eyes and hands. "And 'tis little he knows of girls, and their ways, when he goes and gives you jewels fit for the Queen, by way of making you content in the jungle. Oh, the poor unfortunate, innocent man! The Lord help him!"

And with this pious invocation, Peggy solemnly stalked out of the room, and did not forget to shut the door behind her.

Peggy disapproved of the necklace, that was very clear; but then she was superstitious. The more I looked at it, the more I was enamoured of it: I could hardly bring myself to take it off. In the end I folded it up carefully in its chamois leather covering, and put it under my pillow, and

slept on it ; and dreamt of Begums, and palaces, of wearing my diamonds in the presence of thousands of spectators, who shouted, and clapped their hands, and shrieked out, that "I was an Indian Princess, and that I had the Evil Eye!"

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER PAUL.

“Of manners gentle, of affections mild,
In wit a man ; simplicity a child.”

POPE.

I SHOULD like to know, if anything in this world looks more melancholy than an abandoned Indian station?—a station, that in the grand old days of “John Company,” was the centre of a great district, and boasted a judge, a collector, a couple of infantry regiments, some squadrons of cavalry, half-a-dozen young ladies, a church, an assembly-room, and a thickly-crowded cemetery ; but that, thanks to being three or four hundred miles from the new-fangled railway-line, had found itself suddenly deserted ! The fiat went forth,

head quarters were removed to a more central position, and the forsaken cantonment was left without appeal—to Snakes—Jackals—and utter desolation. True, a few old Chuprassies and Peons — too old to transplant, still linger in corners of godowns and cook-houses; true that one brave Eurasian family went and took up a triumphant and gratuitous tenure, of the General's palatial abode—but they left it, within a month, in a state of the deepest dejection; there was *no* holding out against the surrounding silence. The gardens are invariably the first to go—how soon they resemble a wilderness! then the Bungalows gradually become—first shabby—then “out of repair”—finally roofless ruins. Month by month, year by year, the buildings fall hopelessly to decay, and the once well-worn roads, become more grass-grown and indistinct. To ride through an old, forgotten, Indian station—where the word “Ichabod” seems scrawled on every crumbling wall—is a most truly depressing experience!

Paldi was such—on a very humble scale; but *it* had never been a military cantonment and no gaping, roofless barracks, no dreary,

silent horse lines, no sad, forgotten cemetery, was *its* lot! Still, as one approached it from the higher ground, it had a mournful, forlorn appearance, and looked strangely out of keeping, with the surrounding jungle, and vast flat tracts of cotton soil. There were the mounds of the old Bungalows, their compounds still recognisable, with their hedges of aloe, and wide breaches, there was a wide stretch of level ground, known as "the race-course"—indeed a few of the wooden posts still marked its outline, though most of them lay rotting in the surrounding Cholum fields; there stood a gaunt, gray, gable end, once a part of the busy factory, now a shelter for sheep, and goats; last of all, our own substantial-looking abode, with its great avenue of Peepuls, and its massive, solid walls, standing out above the river-bank, as if in broad defiance of Time, who had so cruelly smitten its companions.

"Father, how did you ever discover this place?" I asked one evening as we came within sight of Paldi, after a long gallop over the hot yellow plains. "It must be a hundred miles from everywhere—even the villagers within

quite a short distance have never heard of it!"

"I came across it accidentally," he answered, "many years ago, when I was out with a shooting party. It was not a heap of ruins *then*. Most of the Bungalows were standing, and ours had the traces of considerable taste and care—the furniture was as you see it now, and I suppose too heavy for transport; the garden was not quite a wilderness; and a melancholy old man who had once been a Khansamah was in charge, and showed us all over the premises."

"Yes — please tell me more," I urged eagerly.

"Well, I took a fancy to the place, and said to one of my companions, that if ever a man was driven by circumstances to seek a sanctuary from the world, here was the spot, where he could most effectually bury himself alive."

"Yes," I acquiesced. Father's remark was undeniable.

"And I recalled Paldi to mind—long afterwards—and bought the Bungalow, and a hundred acres, for a mere song; here, for the last seven-

teen years, I have figuratively interred myself—and you!”

“Yes,” I again assented in a faint voice. I would gladly have forfeited my diamond necklace for the power to ask one question, but I could not put my thoughts into words. A scorching suspicion flashed through my brain, with the vividness of fire on a dark night, that it might not be grief or eccentricity, or an overpowering love of sport and Sanscrit, that had chained father to this desolate spot. My lips moved, but I could not articulate a sound; however, I fancy that my eyes, for once, undertook their office, for father, searching my tell-tale face—crimson one moment, white the next—said:

“No, no, Ranee—it is not what you suppose. No, my dear, nothing compels me to stay here—I live in this place at my own pleasure—pleasure! That is hardly the right word. Why,” he exclaimed in quite another voice, “I do believe I see Father Paul’s green bullock cart, and Manette the goat, half-way up our avenue. Come along, come along, or he will be there before us;” and we broke simultaneously into a sharp canter,

and, nevertheless, we were only just in time to welcome our venerable guest, as he stiffly alighted at the back verandah.

Father Paul Marèchale was an old French priest, our only friend, and our sole visitor ! About three times a year he came to see us, and stayed a week or two ; always receiving an enthusiastic welcome from our little household. Father liked him—he was his one rare cultivated companion. I loved him, he was my dear confidant and adviser—a kind of medium between father and Peggy, more sympathetic than him, more intellectual than her ; and Peggy—to Peggy he was simply a blessed saint, and her adored spiritual pastor. As long as I remembered anything, I remembered Father Paul, his shabby black *soutane*, and gigantic solar topee ; the expression of his face was mild and benevolent—though his dark eyes could be piercing at times ; his snowy hair fell over his shoulders, whilst his venerable beard descended to his waist. He was a well-known character in Central India, famed for his energy, his eloquence, and his entire devotion to his work. As a young man, he had traversed hundreds of miles on foot,

with the staff in his hand—after the manner of the early disciples, merely subsisting on rice and chupatties ; fanning the dying embers of Christianity in some remote districts, and kindling it for the first time in others ; but now, that he was old and lame, he travelled in a little bullock cart, which represented his home. It contained a few books, his vestments, and some simple medicines for the benefit of his scattered flock. His sole companions were a native driver, a milch goat, and a little red cock (whose function it was to call him betimes). The bird was perfectly tame, and travelled on the roof of the cart—he, and Mannette the goat, were both celebrities in their way, and much prized by their master ; and, indeed, it occasionally happened that when Mannette was tired, she took her turn inside the bandy, and the padre followed on foot. Thus accompanied, Father Paul journeyed over miles and miles of plains, to reach far-away villages, where lived descendants of St. Francis Xavier's converts, who had possibly not been visited by a priest for years—here he would halt his cart under a shady tree, assemble all the community, teach, exhort, expound to them for several days, ad-

minister the sacraments, and then pass on. The field was so large, and the labourers so few.

"Where have you been, Father Paul?" I asked, as I sprang down from the saddle, and seized both his hands most eagerly. "How long you have stayed away!—we thought you were lost."

"Yes, we have not laid eyes on your Reverence for this eight months," added Peggy reproachfully.

"You shall hear all about me, my friends. I made a long march to-day to reach my 'oasis' in the desert, and we are all tired," pointing to the dusty and exhausted animals.

"Come along, then," said father, "and rest. Ranee and Peggy will look after your creature comforts, and your creatures' comfort, and have your room ready in no time."

To this the padre acquiesced without a word, whilst Peggy went away to the kitchen, and I took charge of the bullocks, and Mannette, and Hugo, the cock.

Hugo was easily disposed of—or rather he disposed of himself, after a light supper of grain, on the roof of the cart, as usual. Mannette

I led off to the stables. She had her own especial stall, at a prudent distance from Jaina's lair. The bullocks and their driver knew their quarters. When I returned breathless with giving orders, and passing from store to spare room, and spare room to store room, I found Peggy in her own sanctum, busily occupied in making some first-rate *café noir*, such as his Reverence loved. She looked up at me, and nodded her head three times very solemnly.

"He took the master's arm," she said, "a thing he never done before. Well, well, well! he has wore himself out in a good cause, and slaved, and spent himself this fifty year, and hasn't he it all before him?"

"I suppose he has," I assented. "He certainly has not had much pleasure in *this* life."

"Pleasure!" she snorted. "You are always thinking of that, even in *Heaven*! God forgive you, Miss Diana, but I'm afraid you are a real bad girl!"

"I dare say I am, and I cannot help it."

"I wish I could take ye to hear the new coadjutor at Kolar! He is a terribly wicked

preacher, and 'tis him would make ye tremble for your soul! Not like his Reverence here, so gentle and so encouraging—'tis *too* much encouragement he gives you, I'm thinking."

I did not deign to notice this remark. I had no time to argue *now*, but, snatching up the tray in front of Peggy, carried it out into the verandah with my own fair hands. As I poured out Father Paul's favourite beverage, and anxiously plied him with eatables, I was amazed to hear that he had actually been to France, since he had last paid us a visit.

"To France!" father and I had echoed in one breath; and I added: "Why did you go? And how long did you stay?"

"I went, my child, because I had an irrepressible craving to see my native land, after an absence of forty years. I could not rest, so painful was the longing. Well, I went; and guess how long I stayed. *Two days!* Yes, I am in earnest. My wish was as a Dead Sea apple. I arrived on the spot, where every stone, and every face, were burnt into my memory, by years and years of exile. I sought my old home, near the village among the vine-

yards. The village was unchanged, it was *I* who was changed. I walked up the narrow streets, a stranger. Not one familiar face met mine, not a soul stretched out a hand of welcome to the lame old priest! Our very name was forgotten and out of mind. My brothers were dead, and I was the last of my race. I looked into the butcher's shop, with the familiar name 'Moreau' still above it. I visited the forge, the shoemaker's, and the cabaret, and then I sat down and called for bread and cheese, and put a few questions to the stout good-natured hostess. She told me that Dubois, the big vine-dresser, was dead, his sons were killed in the war. Monsieur Girault, the curé! Oh, he was long before *her* days. And the family at the château. Yes, Polté, a jeweller from the Rue de la Paix. The old family were all dead and buried. 'Pardon, madame, all but one,' interrupted a red-faced man, with a fierce eye. 'There was one, a priest, who went to the Indies, to squeeze money from the blacks; and he, if he is not dead, he ought to be.' I sat and listened. The old family was not quite forgotten. It was discussed, abused, ridiculed.

There was not one spark of gratitude or regret attached to our name. Then I saw that these things were sent to me as a lesson and a penance. Our true home is heaven; *that* is the only country on which we should fix our hearts. So I prayed for a while, in the little old chapel, and straightway set my face towards the east. I had been two days in France—two days!—forty-eight hours after forty years! But it was enough. My duty lay in this land, and I have come back here to work—and die.”

“Do not talk of dying,” I said impetuously. “We cannot spare you, either to heaven, or France.”

He shook his head at me, and then pursued:

“The flesh is weak. As I travelled through the rich sunny plains of my own beautiful native country, tears, hot tears, rolled down my cheeks. They did, indeed, *mon enfant*. I came back to my flock, and Chinnia, and the bullocks, and Mannette the goat. Their welcome warmed my foolish old heart. *They* had not forgotten!”

“And two months are not forty years,” remarked father drily. *He* did not believe in constancy—or gratitude, I knew; but he need not

have said so to poor Father Paul, who believed in everything that was good of everybody.

Father and our old friend used to sit up talking, discussing, and arguing, till very late hours at night, and Peggy, and her Pastor, generally conversed in the morning, whilst his conversations with me usually took place out of doors, in the cool of the evening, before sundown. Together we would pace the garden, the avenue, the compound, he with his venerable head bent upon his chest, his hands loosely clasped behind his back, gravely listening to my crude, wild ideas—ideas, which he pruned, modified, or cut down, in a friendly and delicate manner. I know that Peggy, standing afar off, with her arms akimbo, surveyed these walks and talks with unmitigated approval; she had her own ideas about these discourses. The holy man, who had spent his best years in converting the heathen, would never die happy, until her own little lamb was gathered into his Church. But Peggy was wrong! Father Paul never made the slightest attempt to proselytise me. No; I was a Protestant. Every morning father read aloud two chapters and the daily Psalms to Peggy and myself, and up to quite a

recent date, I struggled through my Catechism and Collect every Sunday; and father always had morning service, and this also Peggy attended. Though a very strict Catholic, I believe she was shamed into this liberality by our generous example, for we were always present at Father Paul's ministrations in the little chapel in the mango grove. When it was known that he was with us, quite a large congregation would assemble there—sometimes as many as fifty people, who had probably been walking all night, would kneel to receive his blessing, as he celebrated mass at the rude stone altar. And from its steps he afterwards delivered an eloquent address in the Marathi tongue. To these toil-worn peasants, but one degree removed from want, what need to preach of the dangers of riches, sloth, and worldly ambition? No need to denounce avarice, to men in the vice-like grasp of money-lenders, or to preach temperance to people who lived on grain, and water. Their lives of unmitigated labour set them apart from many temptations: it was all work—nothing but work. To these weary, eager listeners, he spoke of faith, of an easy yoke, and of another and a better country.

More than once, Peggy amazed me as she and I walked home together, by suddenly breaking out as it were into argument with a third, and invisible party. "And where's the harm, will ye tell me that? And don't I attend *their* prayers? and aren't we all striving to get to the same place?"

From which it was evident that, although Peggy Magee lived in the jungle, and was a poor ignorant creature, who could neither read or write, she had an unusually liberal mind. One evening Father Paul and I stood on the bank of the river, and watched in silence a gorgeous Indian sun sink to the west, as it were in flames. Our eyes were fixed on the brilliant crimson horizon, and the banks of golden clouds, that threw graceful palms, feathery bamboos, and a wedge-shaped flock of wild fowl, into bold relief.

"How beautiful the world is!" exclaimed the old priest, out of the fulness of his heart. "How beautiful!" he repeated in a dreamy voice. "Who would not enjoy the stillness of nature!"

I made no answer, palms and sunsets were

such very common sights, and certainly did not embody the world, in *my* opinion, nor did the stillness of nature appeal to my tastes.

"*Ma fille*," he said, suddenly turning to me, and fixing his sunken dark eyes on mine, "I want to talk to you seriously. Our friend Peggy tells me that you are weary of this life. Is it so?"

"Not always," I answered, colouring; "only when father is away, and then as your people say, *je m'ennuie*!"

"Ah," he sighed, "my foolish little lamb, so safely folded, you do not know when you are well off; but it is ever thus! *Si vieillesse pouvait, si jeunesse savait*. Why are you discontented when your father is away? You have Peggy, your pets, and your books."

"It is no good," I answered brusquely. "When I am alone, I feel desperate at times, and as if I must get on Cassim's back, and gallop away to see the world. I long for change, as you longed for France."

"And to find it all vanity and disappointment."

"It may be so; but oh, Father Paul, surely

I have a life of my own, to live apart from all this!" stretching my hands with a sudden passionate gesture, towards the setting sun, and tinted plains. "I want to live, to feel, to act!"

"Act the part of a good daughter, feel for the sorrows of others, lead a pure and innocent life, is not that sufficient for you?"

"It ought to be, I know. And oh, mon Père! and it is only to *you* that I dare to say such a wicked thing, it is *not* enough. No, try as I will, pray as I will, to keep my thoughts at home and within bounds, they fly away in spite of me, into the great world. Father Paul, you know my heart now, I wish to be happy here, I *must* be happy here; give me a cure for this disease of discontent."

"Alas, my child! I wish I could," he answered mournfully. "Let us try and go to the root of the matter. What is your most ardent wish, supposing you left this peaceful home? What do you want to do?"

"I wish to do something *great* before I die, I want to be known, to be celebrated, to be talked of," clasping my hands together feverishly, as I spoke.

"To be talked of! oh, my poor child!"

"Yes, to sacrifice myself for some noble cause, some great person. Father Paul, you will think me mad, but I believe there will be stirring scenes in my life *yet*. You look grave; does what I say distress you?"

"No, *ma fille*, but yours is a restless, impetuous spirit; full of doubts and discontent. You are impressionable, impulsive, hot-tempered, and easily led; alas! the world would be full of pitfalls for *you*.—You imagine yourself capable of some heroic self-sacrifice, and yet you cannot undertake the simple duty, that has been put in your hand. Be a comfort to your father, be satisfied with the pleasure of your present lot.—Ah," very sternly, "I see the task is *too* easy! One reads your thoughts so plainly! Take care, my daughter, that a far heavier one is not required of you, as a punishment for your vain wishes, and selfish discontent."

I shivered involuntarily as he spoke; it seemed to my excited imagination, that there was a ring of prophetic warning, in that last sentence, and a chill tremor of apprehension

seized me in an icy grasp. "I wish you could see some of our holy women, and the lives of devotion they lead," he went on in a different voice.

"Do you mean nuns?" I asked in a very subdued key.

"Yes, nuns toiling from morning to night among heathen children, nursing the sick, consoling the dying, and maintaining themselves by their own hands. *They* have no luxuries, no servants, no airy rooms, no punkahs, no ice, nothing to alleviate the heat of this climate. During the cholera at Pùrda the Reverend Mother and seven Sisters died at their posts; there is no devotion like theirs!"

"No doubt," I acquiesced; "but even among the heathen there is devotion, and charity too. Some of our own servants, are angels compared to *me*."

"How do you mean?" he demanded very gravely.

"Do you see that old man over there?" I replied, pointing to a garden coolie, with thin, withered arms, and sunken, patient face. "He is

the most devoted and unselfish man, I know. If you will come with me to the back of the Bungalow, I will show you what I mean."

In answer to my invitation, Father Paul accompanied me round to a large building that was probably once a double coach-house, and at first sight seemed dark, and empty; but soon our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and there was a stir in a distant corner, and we made out a rude mud bed covered with a native blanket, under which lay some small object that looked like a child. Hearing steps it pushed aside the covering with a brown, shrivelled claw, and then it appeared to be a monkey, but on closer inspection, it was *no* monkey, but a human being; a little, withered old man, who rose, scrambled down on the floor, and came towards us on all fours. He was bent double with age, his head was hairless, his mouth toothless, his eyes purblind and sunken in their sockets; altogether he was a most startling spectacle—the very rind and shell of humanity!

"This is old Rukoo," I said, introducing him.
"He was once a Marathi soldier, and fought in the

days of Clive and Wellington. He must be a hundred and twenty years of age at the very least, as he was one of the garrison of "Ram Tek" fort ninety years ago."

"Yes," assented Father Paul, instinctively retreating, as the ancient warrior, hastily groping about in search of *me*, fastened his skinny fingers in his *soutane*, and clamorously demanded alms and betel-nut, in a cracked, unearthly voice. "You shall have it, Rukoo, you shall have bread and coffee," I stooped down and shouted in Marathi; "but you must be good and go back to bed and lie down." He always obeyed me, strange to say, and he now turned round at once, and slowly crawled back to his lair, with many guttural mutterings. "He used to spend his days among the ruins by the river," I explained to Father Paul; "and as a small child I was very much afraid of him, and thought, *he* was the man who had an evil spirit, and dwelt among the tombs; but as I grew bigger we became great friends, and I used to ask him questions about battles, and plunder—but he never would talk of himself."

"I should think his reminiscences would be interesting. He is fifty years older than I am ; he is a living link with the distant past," said the padre, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but when I ask him questions, he only shakes his head and says, 'No, that is *my* life.'"

"And about this act of charity, *ma fille*?"

"Oh, I was forgetting—this garden coolie I pointed out is old, and wretchedly poor, his wages are but four rupees a month—barely sufficient to feed himself—and yet for many years he has supported that old creature, who is not even a relation ; and he goes hungry, and in rags, that he may have blankets and plenty of rice and ghee, and returns after his long day's work, to cook for him, and feed him—and for all his pains, gets nothing but scratches and abuse ; yet still he toils on, year after year, looking for no reward, here or elsewhere.—Now the nuns expect to find their reward in Heaven !"

"Nay, nay, my child," he interrupted ; "I am not denying the existence of noble lives among these people ; alas ! there are many great souls

striving in outer darkness.—Should not that miserable old coolie be a noble example to you?—you who have youth, health, friends, luxuries—and yet you are discontented.”

I hung my head with shame—I had been rebuked, silenced, and condemned, out of my own mouth!

When Father Paul left us on this occasion, he promised to return before long—he was only going to a village a hundred miles off, in the Taluk of Sydapet.

“Good-bye, my child, God bless you! Let me find you a more contented girl, when I return.”

These were his last words, as we parted company beside an old temple, to which I had escorted him on horseback. I remained for some time, wistfully watching, until the little green bullock-cart, cock and goat, had turned a corner of the track, and then I rode slowly homewards, recalling as I went, my recent talks with the padre, and his unusually long private conversations with father. I puzzled my head considerably, over one mysterious sentence of his,

that I had accidentally overheard, as I entered the dining-room the previous evening :

“And still you say that you will never tell her.”

To which father answered, “*Never.*”

CHAPTER VIII.

“THE PRINCE.”

“Also, he set at all the brazen doors,
A doubled guard ;
Yet who shall shut out fate ?”

ARNOLD.

“RAM TEK,” once garrisoned by old Rukoo, was a massive Mahratta stronghold, that crowned one of a range of hills about ten miles west of Paldi. To reach it, we struck across a bare plain intersected by the sandy beds of water-courses, with an occasional oasis, in the shape of an isolated village, half hidden in a mango tope, and here and there a Hindoo shrine, and here and there, a few Mahomedan graves. After the rains, this tract of country would be extremely fertile, covered with thick crops of

paddy, grain, cotton, and cholum, and the dry nullahs metamorphosed into rushing brown torrents. Now, under the fierce May sun (setting at present) father and I urged our horses over a plain as barren and as arid as their own Arabian deserts. We were bound for Ram Tek, where father had business with an old Brahmin priest, and I was always delighted to accompany him on these expeditions, for the ruined fort and quaint old temple retained their first attractions for me still. Within a mile of our destination, we came upon an ancient paved road lined with forest trees, and the hills that had looked so blue afar off, seemed suddenly changed to green, and completely clothed with shrubs. We soon reached a straggling red-roofed village, that clustered round the foot of the hill, on the summit of which stood a rugged old fort, above whose casemented walls towered the white domes of several holy temples—landmark for many miles. Hundreds of years previously, some Mahratta freebooter, had made them the centre of his fastness, from whence he doubtless frequently descended to harry and pillage the

neighbouring plains. Father and I, rode slowly up a narrow, and very steep track, that wound round the hill, between rocks and trees, and lovely flowering shrubs, many of the latter being covered with red, and purple flowers. Families of large, able-bodied monkeys, lumbered lazily from tree to tree, and now and then, a gaudy peacock and his wives swept hurriedly across our path. Having reached a plateau, we dismounted, and entered the fort, by a narrow back door in the outer wall. The interior was immense—it afforded scope for many temples—half a dozen tanks of green stagnant water, a whole herd of sacred cows, and numbers of sleek, dreamy-eyed Brahmins. The highest and holiest temple of all was guarded by a man in scarlet, armed with a drawn sword, and seated near him on the steps, was a mild-faced old man, with his long beard neatly parted in the middle, and tucked behind his ears: this was father's particular friend “Govindoo,” and the Chief Priest of Ram, the Monkey God! He greeted us most cordially, and almost immediately, he and father fell into a serious literary discussion,—a discussion that had no interest for me. I did

not care two straws about the "Metakshara," much less the "Vyahavara Mayuka," and carefully gathering together my clean white habit, I clambered up the walls of the fort, and with my elbows resting on the ramparts, surveyed the scene. There I beheld, stretching far away to the north, and covered with impassable forests, the great highlands of Central India, once part of the Maharastra, or Kingdom of the Peishwas; the country directly below me, was coloured brown and red, and yellowish, dotted with villages, concealed in shady topes of Peepul, or tamarind; diversified by one or two patches of glittering water; and over all, the evening clouds were drifting, and casting rapid, rugged, shadows as they chased each other into the west. I turned and looked back on the grim old fort, with its rusty cannon, and placid priests, and cows. I had seen them all so often! I knew the face of every Brahmin—yea, of every cow! Father seemed entirely absorbed in earnest philosophic discourse. *No* chance of his company for another hour. So I resolved to go down, and spend that time, in my favourite seat by the water; and telling him where to find me,

I quitted the temples, passed through the great entrance, guarded on either side by a gigantic stone monkey, and slowly descended the six hundred steps, which led to the sacred lake. These steps were protected by elaborately carved balustrades, and gradually wound round the hill, till they reached the water at its base: they were luxurious steps! broken by long, generously planned, breathing spaces—and shallow steps, that cost little exertion to descend; passing between shady trees, flowering shrubs, and carved idols in niches, and at every turn catching some new glimpse of the holy lake, that lay beneath, embosomed in the lap of low green hills. This lake was entirely surrounded by curious old temples — temples to Pigs, Elephants, and Monkeys, and hidden among a tangle of Tamarind, and Neem, and Peepul trees, was a large village. I found its inhabitants much as usual—fishing, washing, gossiping, and praying—I reached the end of my journey, and took up my station, in my favourite resort in the porch of a building called the “Rat” Temple, because it contained an enormous effigy of one of those unworthy little beasts. Here, with

my back to the hill, and with the water at my feet, I sat, and looked at the lake, which resembled a burnished mirror, and threw back such accurate reflections, that it seemed to be lined with a double row of shrines. I was by no means "far from the madding crowd!" Men and women were talking and laughing, and washing brass chatties. Pious Brahmins, were dipping devoutly, and reciting the "mantras," or evening prayer; not far from me, a school-boy in spectacles, was proudly displaying a new book—"The Thousand and One Persian Days" to a large and eager circle. At first, I had slightly diverted their attention; but after all, *I* was no novelty, and soon they trooped off, to a great flat stone jutting out into the water, where they clustered round the scholar, like a swarm of bees, whilst he read aloud in a sing-song voice. Another flat stone was shared by two women, with a large scarlet idol, and a little naked child, from a distant doorway, made the hills and temples echo with her shrill cries, to her mother, to "come home, come home." I took off my hat, leant my head against the

stone-work, and fell into an agreeable reverie. As I gazed dreamily at the water, I set to work on a superb air castle, and gave myself, in imagination, many pleasant experiences, which were refused by reality. Balls, and ball dresses, pictures, carriages, sight-seeing, and troops of appreciative friends—girl friends—lovers and admirers? No. Perhaps some day when I was much older—and tired of amusing myself—and seeing strange things, I might happen to meet—somebody. The gabbling of the crowd, the droning of the reading-boy, the cooing of doves, and the occasional screech of a peacock in the woods, gradually became vague and distant sounds—I caught myself nodding twice—at length, I leant back (my thick plaits making a kind of cushion against the stone-work) and yielded, without further protest, to the treacherous seduction of *Sleep*.

How long I slumbered, I know not; but at last I was effectually aroused, by hearing father's quick spurred foot, coming along the flagged pavement, and descending the steps. Strange to say, he never glanced back into my well-known

niche ; but passed rapidly down to the water's edge. I gazed in amazement, and then I discovered that I was looking at a stranger ! A man, not so tall as father, but well-built, slight, and very erect. He wore a wide, gray felt hat, brown riding-boots and cord breeches, a checked cotton coat, and carried a little cane in his hand, with which he tapped his boot, as he surveyed the scene, blissfully unconscious of my presence.

I rose, pushed back my hair, and rubbed my sleepy eyes—perhaps I was still asleep ?

At this instant, the vision turned sharply round, and discovered *me* ! He took off his hat, lifted it quite off his head, and I saw that he was young and good-looking. He had very dark blue eyes, a clearly-cut aquiline nose, close-cropped black hair, and no beard—merely a moustache, which concealed an exceedingly short upper lip, and—as I afterwards discovered—very brilliant white teeth. I stood and stared, I hope not rudely ; but he was the first European I had ever beheld, excepting father, Peggy, and the padre. And he on his side, looked back at me, with an equal, if not excessive display, of interest and amazement ; undoubtedly he was much sur-

prised to see an English girl, in this outlandish spot! For a moment there was a dead silence, and then he spoke in a pleasant, clear, deliberate voice :

"I hope I have not startled you?"

I made no reply. For *once* in my life, I was speechless, and dazed with astonishment.

"I am afraid I disturbed your slumbers!" he continued with a sort of twinkle in his eye; still I could not recover the use of my tongue. I merely continued to stare stupidly at my interlocutor, and struggle vainly, to recall my manners, and my self-command.

Then as if struck by some happy thought, he addressed me in French, but before he had uttered half a dozen words, I stammered out, "I am English."

"Ah, I thought so!" he rejoined quite coolly, and turning his head he glanced up at the sky, then back at me, and laughed, and said :

"I am only looking to see if there are any *more* coming!—for of course you dropped from the clouds?"

"Of course," I answered with involuntary readiness; the words seemed to escape me unawares.

After this, there was another silence. How blue his eyes were, and how merry, and how straight they looked out from under his level black brows!

"It's a queer old place," he remarked, turning once more, and surveying the sacred lake and temples, "and well worth coming a few miles out of one's way to see."

As he evidently expected a reply, I favoured him with one that astonished him. I said:

"Is it?"

"Certainly it is!" he returned, looking at me sharply. "I fancy some of these shrines are a couple of thousand years old! It was by the merest accident we came here. I am out with a shooting party—like yourself, I conclude—and as this was a blank day, and we were all rather sick of the Dâk Bungalow at Saloor, we tossed a rupee to see whether we would come over here or not. I am awfully glad we came—now."

If this was intended as a compliment, it was entirely thrown away on my more than Arcadian simplicity, but "pitch and toss," I thoroughly understood; I had often tossed Peggy for sweets, and plaintains, in my early years. Little did I

guess that by the spinning of a coin, in the Dâk Bungalow at Saloor, my future lot in life had been decided.

At this moment, a shrill familiar whistle, resounded from the top of the hill—father’s usual signal for me—so without a single farewell word, or glance, I seized my hat, gathered up my habit, ran up the steps, and hurried away. But I had barely reached the Great Stone Monkeys, defending the long ascent, when I heard a voice saying :

“I believe this is your property,” and turning I saw the stranger beside me, holding out my whip, which in my flurry I had dropped, and forgotten. It was a pretty little gold-mounted toy—a recent “surprise” from father ; and my full name, “Diana Barrington,” was engraved on the handle—and I felt certain as I took it from its finder, that he had made himself master of this piece of information.

“Will you allow me to see you back to your party ?” he said. “You are bound to meet a lot of dirty Fakeers on these steps.”

Party! What did he mean? And the idea of requiring an escort, in case of meeting Fakeers,

and Brahmins—many of whom were personal acquaintances—was too ridiculous! I could not help smiling as I said, “No, thank you. And you have not half seen the lake. The big temple at the far end,” standing and pointing with my whip, “has some carvings that are well worth examining.”

“Thanks, no. I have seen quite enough”—probably more than he expected for that matter—“I am only down on parole, the others are waiting for me, half-way up—they were too lazy to come any further. The terrors of going back were too much for them.”

The terrors of going back were not too much for *me*. I was well used to these six hundred steps, and could run up them almost as nimbly as a goat. I commenced to run now, and I flatter myself that my speed and agility astonished my companion, who lazily remonstrated, and said:

“Where is the hurry?”

To *me* the “hurry” was embodied in a stern person, in a large scarlet turban, who did not like to be kept waiting. So I turned a deaf

ear to his expostulations, and dashed on in silence. Fast we went, and faster and faster, until at last—and I confess it with shame and blushes—it became a downright *race* between us. He was wiry and active, and firmly resolved not to be beaten by a girl. Moreover he had a wonderful stride, and very frequently, and most unfairly, took *two* steps at a time. I had the advantage of knowing my ground, and here and there made a clever, if rather shabby, short cut. All the same, I was defeated. When we had done about three hundred steps—naturally in dead silence—I was compelled to stop, and put my hand to my side, and pant for breath.

"Had enough of it?" shouted my opponent, halting half-way up the flight above me, and mopping his forehead with a very smart handkerchief.

I nodded in reply, for I could not speak.

"If you had beaten me," he said, descending to my level, "I should have gone straight down, and drowned myself in the lake."

And then we both burst out laughing, and

a joint laugh, as every one knows, is a huge stride in making people acquainted. After this, we plodded up together at a more reasonable pace, I treating his pressing invitations to "sit down and rest" with the contempt they merited.

"Miss Barrington," he said suddenly, "allow me to congratulate you on your extraordinary activity. I never saw a girl run like you in all my born days."

"How do you know that my name is Barrington?" I asked rather stiffly.

"*Much* against my will, I was taught to read, and I could not help seeing your name on your whip. It ought to be 'Atalanta,' not Diana."

I was about to retort with some sharp little speech—for I had an uneasy suspicion that this good-looking stranger was making fun of me, and becoming altogether too familiar—when the sound of singing arrested my tongue. Somewhere above us, on the steps, some one was singing in a rollicking, melodious voice. The words of the song—distinctly audible as we

toiled up—were truly extraordinary, and not only extraordinary, but mysterious.

"Oh, had I a lumpty tum, tumpty tum, too,
 In the land of the olive and fig,
 I would sing, Oh my lumpty tum, tumpty to you,
 And play on the thing-a-majig !
 And if in the tumpty tum battle I fall,
 A lumpty is all that I crave !
 Oh bury me deep in the what-you-may-call,
 And plant thing-am-bobs over my grave."

"What is that?" I asked excitedly.

"Oh, that's Peter," replied my companion complacently. "He is allaying Colonel Raitt's impatience with soft Lydian airs."

"Peter," I repeated.

"Yes. We call him Peter, although his name is George, and I am sure I don't know *why*, unless from that line in *King John*—

If his name be George, I'll call him Peter,
 For new-made honour doth forget men's names.

I believe some wag at school dubbed him Peter, and it suits him down to the ground."

"Hallo, Hugh!" shouted a voice directly

above us. "Come along, old man. Don't be all night. What the dickens has kept you?"

And as we rounded a curve of the steps, we came in sight of two more strangers—(and then *they* possibly understood, what had delayed their companion!)—sitting, one on each side of the low balustrade, smoking most industriously.

One was a little, copper-coloured, elderly man, with a stubbly beard, bushy eyebrows, and an aggressive-looking cocked nose; he was clad in a rough green shikar suit, a huge sun topee; a pair of short, sturdy, stockinged legs, with creditable calves, were thrust out in front of him. The other was a mere youth, with pale, sharply-cut features, quick gray eyes, very light hair, and an almost imperceptible moustache—he had no claims to good looks—but he had a clever shrewd face with a nice frank expression; his expression on beholding *me*, was so irresistibly comic, that I had considerable difficulty in keeping my countenance and gravity, and I fiercely impressed on my giddy inclinations, that I was among total strangers, and that I was to *try* and behave like a lady—to quote Peggy's oft-repeated injunction.

But this young man's eyes seemed to expand, and his mouth was half open! I noticed that he and the elder sportsman had abandoned themselves more entirely to their jungle surroundings, than *my* companion—they looked unshorn, and their flannel shirts were open at the throat—and minus collars; whilst he, not only wore a collar, but a neat silk tie, loosely knotted beneath it!

"You see I was not the *only* sightseer," he triumphantly explained, as his two friends removed their cheroots, and rose, and stared. How they *did* stare! "Miss Barrington, will—will you permit me to introduce Colonel Raitt, and Mr. Hare?"

Colonel Raitt and Mr. Hare lifted their topees and bowed. Never had people been presented to me before, and I did not know what to do. I had a wild idea of taking off my hat, but luckily abandoned it, and did nothing!

"*Another* shikar party, of course!" said Colonel Raitt with a forced smile. "I thought *we* were first in this part of the world—but it's just our luck all over!—isn't it?" turning to my first acquaintance; who replied:

"Our luck! I should just think so!" And he looked straight at *me*.

"Have your people had good sport?" continued the old gentleman.

"Yes—thank you!" I answered in a hurried whisper.

"Well, it's more than we can say! We have been out six weeks, and made no bag at all—beyond a few black buck, and cheetul."

"One cheetul, four black buck, a peacock, and a porcupine," supplemented Mr. Hare very glibly.

"Most extraordinary! and I have the best shikarri in the Presidency. What sport had your people?" continued Colonel Raitt, of course addressing himself to me.

"Father got four tigers, ten panther, and I forget how many bison, and wild buffalo," I answered modestly.

"The deuce he did!" exclaimed Colonel Raitt in great excitement. "And how many guns were out?"

"He generally takes two rifles," was my innocent rejoinder.

"And—was it in this neighbourhood that he made the bag?"

"No."

"And now I suppose he has come to beat *this* side of the country," exclaimed my questioner, with transparent annoyance. "Is your camp in the neighbourhood?" he continued sharply.

I felt the hot blood rising to my cheeks.

"Why," I asked myself, "should this ugly old man, stand right in my way asking me all these stupid questions?" I made no reply—and tried to edge onwards.

"Where is your camp?" he reiterated imperiously.

"We have no camp," I answered impatiently, "we live here."

"*What!*" he almost shouted.

Another shrill and still more peremptory whistle came sounding from above us, and hearing this second summons I started forward, in somewhat guilty haste.

"I—I—should like to have a talk with your father, young lady," panted Colonel Raitt, as

he vainly endeavoured to keep pace with me. "I should like to—to—to meet your father, Miss Barrington!"

His wish was fulfilled almost before the words were out of his mouth; in another second, father appeared in sight—red sash, red turban, yellow boots and all—striding hastily down in search of his daughter! He stopped abruptly—as well he might—when he beheld me racing up the steps, closely followed by the three strangers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HORSE WITH THE SILVER BANGLE.

“She was a phantom of delight,
When first she gleamed upon my sight.”
WORDSWORTH.

FATHER remained mute and motionless, on a certain stone landing, whilst we rapidly approached him; and his dark countenance wore an expression far more akin to angry astonishment, than cordial welcome to brother sportsmen.

“Sir,” gasped out Colonel Raitt, as he reached his level, “I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Your daughter tells me—Why—why—God bless my soul, if it is not the Spider! John Barrington! Barrington! my

old friend, of course—of course. Who would have expected to come across a schoolfellow here!” stretching out as he spoke two broad mahogany paws, and grasping father’s hand in a vice. “It’s twenty years and more since we met, but I never forget a face. Don’t you remember Raitt at Mawle’s, and Raitt of the Tom-Toms? I’m in the Irrigation business now!”

“Yes,” replied father, rather grimly; “Booby Raitt, or Second Raitt, as they used to call you; I recollect you well.”

“And are glad to see me, I hope, for the sake of old times,” interrupted the other, not a whit disconcerted by these uncomplimentary reminiscences. “If it was by nothing else, I’d know you by that scar on your cheek-bone—when I shied a slate at Jones Minor, and hit you.”

“What are you doing in this part of the country?” inquired father, after a pause.

“Just what you are doing yourself, my dear fellow! Shooting—only *we* have had no luck at all. These are my companions, Captain Fitzroy, and Mr. Hare,” introducing the pair

with a wave of his hand. "We have made a wretched bag so far. I'm a notorious Shikarri, John, the Boss of the Presidency, and I never had such a season. I can't make out what's come to all the big game. Your daughter tells me, *you* have done uncommonly well, and are camped in the neighbourhood, and I hope, for the sake of old days, you will put us on to a good thing?"

"Where is *your* camp?" inquired father brusquely.

"We sent it off to the banks of the Karrhan, about ten miles away as the crow flies. It's a place that has not been disturbed for years, and these two fellows insisted on coming here to do a bit of sight-seeing. I don't believe in sight-seeing; it's only an excuse for getting up an appetite, and it's a day lost, in my opinion, or would have been, but for meeting you!"

"And, Miss Barrington," supplemented Mr. Hare, who had been hitherto standing rather in the background, and turning up the collar of his coat, and vainly struggling to re-arrange his toilette.

"Ah, Peter, my boy!" said Colonel Raitt, "you

never forget the ladies. I suppose," turning to father, "your horses are in the village, like our own; and it's time for us to be getting back."

"Yes, I should think it was," he acquiesced somewhat grimly.

"You and I, John, will toddle down together, and let the young fellows escort your daughter. That will be about right, eh?" He spoke in the authoritative tone, of one accustomed to organise shooting trips, and post beaters; and we all meekly obeyed his commands. I walked on up the few remaining flights of steps, between Captain Fitzroy and Mr. Hare, and father fell behind, with his schoolfellow.

"Now that's what I call a curious coincidence," remarked Mr. Hare in a hearty voice. "Fancy discovering an old pal on the top of a hill, in the jungle! Queer, is it not?"

"Yes," I muttered, half under my breath.

"And such a hill," he continued; "better, as Shakespeare says, 'to bear the hills you know, than those you know not of.' They say there are six hundred steps between the fort and the lake, but in *my* opinion, they run into six figures.

Thank goodness, here is the old gate at last! Shall we pause, and survey the landscape?"

We halted, and turned round and looked back upon the gray, winding steps, the distant lake, the older couple toiling slowly up, apparently engaged in earnest conversation:

"Quite a Mahratta Gibraltar in its day," observed Captain Fitzroy, as we moved on, and passed under the walls of the old, red fort, festooned with crimson creepers.

I made no reply; I had always understood that Gibraltar was on the *sea*, and did not comprehend such figures of speech.

"You were not in earnest, when you said that you lived here, Miss Barrington?" he continued, with his eyes fixed on my face.

"Yes, quite in earnest," I retorted shortly.

"And have you any neighbours?"

"No."

(At first, as will be seen, I was shy and silent, fearful that I should display my ignorance by speaking unadvisedly with my lips, but soon my love of talking overbore all my qualms!)

"Look here, Miss Barrington," burst out his

companion, "I know you are chaffing us. You are out on a big 'shoot' like ourselves, only you are from the Bengal side; all the same, you are not going to get a rise out of *me*!" and he nodded twice impressively.

The most part of this speech was Greek, as far as I was concerned, and I merely gazed at him in blank amazement.

"You do it awfully well, that I *will* say," was his next strange remark. "I suppose these are your horses," pointing to Cassim and Tippoo, who were standing under the village Peepul trees. "What beauties! Won't you allow me to assist you to mount?"

"No, thank you," I replied, as I put my foot in the stirrup, and nimbly swung myself into the saddle—a feat that seemed to astonish my companions considerably. At this point we were joined by Colonel Raitt and father—who had come surprisingly fast down-hill; and the latter said as he mounted Tippoo, "Colonel Raitt has promised to put up with us for a couple of days, Ranee, so you might canter on ahead, and prepare Peggy, and send a coolie over to Burga to fetch up their camp."

I need scarcely say, that I was not permitted to start on my errand alone. I, and my previous escort, were speedily clattering down the narrow village streets, whilst Colonel Raitt's elderly galloway, vainly endeavoured to keep pace, with the fiery and impatient Tippoo. We young people were presently far ahead ; soon we had passed the last temple, the last little white-washed house, where the evening meal was in preparation, and the herd or weaver, and his family, sat gossiping in the verandah, with their next-door neighbours. Then we cleared an ancient bridge, and struck out into the plain, which embraced the foot of these hills ; miles of park-like country covered with clumps of magnificent Peepul, Tamarind, and Plane trees, thickets of Thorn, and romantic-looking glades. The sun was just sinking, and a vivid primrose glow illuminated half the sky, twilight was falling, and the cries of the jungle-cock and pea-fowl were hushed. Behind us rose a dazzling silver moon — an Indian moon (which seems larger, brighter, and nearer, than in colder climes), and turned the landscape into a fairy-land of beauty. It was such a night as is unknown in higher latitudes,

languorously warm, strangely silent, with that death-like stillness, that is met with in the jungle. The sound of our horses' hoofs on the burnt-up grass, and the chirp of the cheekul (a bird that is supposed to live on the moonbeams), were the only sounds that fell on the ear. Presently a small herd of graceful antelope, skimmed lightly across the road and over the brow of a low hill, and soon after them, to the intense excitement of my two companions, a good-sized panther, crept stealthily over the same track, and then springing among some rocks, was lost to sight.

"Just our luck, to see that brute when our rifles are two miles away," exclaimed Mr. Hare. "I don't suppose we shall get such another chance."

"Oh yes you will," I replied cheerfully, "there are quantities of panther in this part of the country; the natives trap them in large numbers—last season I shot three myself."

"*You* did!" he ejaculated in an awestruck tone.

"Yes. Does it seem very strange?" I asked rather anxiously. "They came prowling round

our place, after calves and goats and dogs; and when father was away last year I sat up and watched for them by moonlight, and shot three. They used to come up close to the verandah, and upon the roof of the cowsheds; and as they had carried off two favourite dogs, and eaten a foal, and several calves, I thought I would try and get rid of them," I concluded apologetically. "Does it seem extraordinary?" I added, with an unusually guilty feeling.

"Well—it—is—unusual," returned Mr. Hare slowly. "I only wish I could boast of having bagged a brace and a half of panthers. Have you ever shot a tiger?"

"Only one—and that was by accident. I used to go out regularly with father, and sit up in the machan in the tree, watching the beat; and once I saw a yellow thing moving through the underwood, and father told me to fire, and I fired, and found that I had killed a tiger!"

"And do you often go out?"

"No; not now—not since I saw a man killed."

"How was that?" they asked in one breath.

“He was our shikarri, and always foolhardy ; he climbed down from his machan too soon, and a wounded tigress sprang at him and dragged him—Oh !” and I shuddered irrepressibly, “I shall never forget it. Father shot the tigress—but it was too late.”

“And did the man die on the spot ?”

“No—not quite. I bandaged up his wounds in our puggarees, and we carried him back to camp, and the natives burned the tiger’s whiskers, but he died that night.”

“Is there supposed to be any special charm, in burning the tiger’s whiskers ?” asked Captain Fitzroy very gravely.

“The natives think so !”

“What rum people they are !” said Mr. Hare. “And by the way, Miss Barrington, what is that queer thing on your horse’s off fore-leg ? It looks like a bracelet.”

“It is a bangle—a horse’s bangle.”

“I never knew that horses sported jewellery—but one is never too old to learn.”

“Caligula’s horse wore golden shoes,” I remarked ; “and I am sure Cassim, is quite as deserving.”

"Caligula!" exclaimed Mr. Hare, with a long stare, and a sorely puzzled expression. "Didn't he win the Derby ages ago?"

Captain Fitzroy laughed delightedly, and said :

"Try again, Peter, my friend ! At present you are wildly astray."

"Oh—yes, I know—of course I know," said Peter eagerly. "He was the fellow who sat in an arm-chair, at the seaside."

His comrade darted a hasty, and deprecating glance at me, and said :

"Pity our ignorance, Miss Barrington ! But do not altogether despise us ! Is there any history attached to your horse's ornament ?"

"It is an ancient Mahratta custom," I rejoined ; "and this bangle was dug up in our compound, and has a curiously chased inscription ; and I had it put on Cassim—more by way of a joke, than anything."

"And had the bangle any meaning, in former times ?"

"Yes. Father says, that when a horseman assumed it in old fighting days, it was a token, that he was resolved to conquer, or *die*."

"No need to ask which *you* will do!" said Mr. Hare.

"No," I replied quite seriously. "I have nothing to conquer except Cassim."

"You will have many slaves besides him, thousands of captives, I should say," he returned gallantly—no longer oppressed by the absence of collar, tie, and waistcoat.

Was this flattery? If it was I did not like it. I looked indignantly—nay I probably scowled at Mr. Hare; and turning my back on the youth, set off at a smart canter.

"Does that silver bangle not interfere with your horse's action?" inquired Captain Fitzroy, as he overtook me.

"You shall judge for yourself, now we are clear of the trees," I answered complacently. "It is all safe going, for the next four miles," and giving Cassim his head, I merged his canter into a brisk gallop.

Cassim had been pulling, and tearing, at his bit for some time past. He was going home, he was fresh, and he was possibly hungry. Moreover, he was much excited by the strange companions thundering in his wake, and the

brisk gallop, soon increased to racing speed! With the bit between his teeth, his head well down between his fore-legs, he was completely my master—not my slave, and I was most painfully alive to the fact. Breathless as was the evening, a violent wind seemed to be singing past my ears, such was the mad pace of my runaway steed.

I knew that there was nothing for it, but to sit still and keep cool; and I was a hardy girl, in excellent training, well used to pulling horses, and mad gallops—though never so mad a gallop, as *this*. Of course, I was too proud, to scream to my eager pursuers to pull up; and I led them on, at break-neck pace, across the level, moonlit plain. For more than two miles I kept ahead at unabated speed, and then I came to broken ground, a regular network of the dry beds of water-courses. My heart beat a good deal faster, as I cleared the first of these; their breadth and depth, I knew, from continually clambering up and down them by daylight; but at this pace, Cassim must fly into them, or over them, according to the limits of his jumping powers! A few

moderate ones he took in his stride, lightly skimming the broken ground, with that cat-like sure-footedness, for which an Arab is unequalled. But now we were nearing the "Big Nullah"—I recognised its vicinity by a gaunt, white Oolee, with bare, distorted arms—a very *ghost* of a tree—and we were making for the very widest part! I gave a frantic tug at Cassim's mouth; it was like cast iron! he was going as fresh, and as fast, as when he had first started. Nearer and nearer, came the ghostly Oolee, nearer and nearer the "Big Nullah;" if we failed to clear it, we would be killed—for it was at least a hundred feet in depth. Nerved to desperation, I struck Cassim with all my might; he sprang madly forward, a dark chasm yawned beneath us, there was a sharp rattle of falling stones, a shout of horror from behind us; but we were over, and had left the "Big Nullah" in our wake! Infuriated by his recent punishment, Cassim tore along as if he had merely cleared a potato furrow, instead of a gulf of twenty feet; but presently the rising ground began to tell on him, and in about five minutes more, he had settled down into a

moderate canter. Very soon, I was joined by Captain Fitzroy, his face looked white — or was it the moonlight? — and his voice was strangely unsteady.

“Well, Miss Barrington,” he exclaimed, “I can’t say much for you as a *pilot*, nor for the value you place on your neck—or ours. I can *now* realise, the experience of those unhappy wretches who have ridden with Herne the Huntsman! I can assure you, that you and your white horse had a most weird effect, as you showed us the way across country. Candidly, did you want to commit suicide just now, when you rode at that yawner?”

“No,” I answered brusquely; “it was Cassim’s fault. I could not hold him!”

“What? He had bolted, had he? Is he often given to that sort of thing?”

“Not often. Sometimes he pulls very hard, but never as much as to-night. Please do not say anything about it—it would only make father nervous.”

“So I should imagine!” he rejoined dryly. “It made *me* uncommonly nervous. I really began to suppose, that you, and your white

horse, were a phantom pair, that were leading me on to destruction.”

“Where is Mr. Hare?” I asked abruptly.

“At the bottom of the first nullah, I should imagine. His pony is not what you would call a free goer; and even I, on an Australian steeple-chaser, had as much as I could do to ‘see the way you went,’ as they say. That Arab of yours, has an extraordinary turn of speed, but he is not fit for a lady—he is not a lady’s horse, you must confess.”

“I confess nothing,” I answered. “I do not know what a lady’s horse should be like, for I have never seen a lady.”

At this amazing statement my companion turned, and looked at me steadfastly, and said: “You are not in earnest, Miss Barrington?”

“Why should I not be in earnest?”

“Do you mean to say that you have lived in the jungle always? Are you serious?”

I nodded impatiently.

I suppose something, in my face, and voice assured him that I was not joking—as he and Mr. Hare seemed to suppose—and for quite two minutes there was silence between us.

"Would it be impertinent of me to ask why you lead such a solitary existence?—Do not answer, if I am too bold."

"I could not answer, if I would," I rejoined; "for I do not know myself, beyond the fact that father likes this kind of life."

"And your mother?"

"My mother is dead. She died when I was a baby."

"And you have no society at *all*?"

"No—none."

"Then *we*, must be quite an extraordinary novelty?"

"Indeed you are.—What brought you to this part of India?"

"Well, Colonel Raitt came out, because it is the thing to go for a big shoot in the hot weather; and he has his reputation to maintain. Peter Hare came, because he likes to get away from society, and to be able to go without a collar! I came, on the chance of bagging a tiger or two, and because I like to see the world."

"You call coming out into the jungle seeing the world?" I exclaimed, in indignant astonishment.

"Well, yes, it is to *me*; and I suppose going to Gurrumpore, would be seeing the world to you!"

"Yes, in one way; but the place I most wish to see is England—and especially London. What is London like? What do you think would strike *me* most, if I were to go there?"

(I was not shy *now*; my foot was on my native plain, although my name was not Mac-Gregor, and this stranger was not the least bit formidable.)

"You ask a very difficult question," he said, pulling his moustache reflectively. "Let me try and imagine myself in your place! Well—I would not be surprised if it was the Fog."

"The Fog! What is Fog?" I ejaculated indignantly. "Captain Fitzroy, I see you take me for an uneducated savage. You are laughing at me——"

"Upon my honour I am not," he interrupted eagerly. "I only give you my own experience. I know that when I run up to town from the country, the Fog is what capsizes *me*."

"And don't you go and see the British

Museum, and the Tower, and Westminster Abbey?"

"Not always," laughing. "I was taken to all those places when I was a kid."

A *kid*! What did he mean?

"Is Colonel Raitt married?" I inquired, suddenly skipping to another subject.

"Yes, very much so," was his enigmatic reply.

"And what is Mrs. Raitt like?"

"How shall I describe her? She is neither young or beautiful, and casts an unusually large shadow—and she has a wonderful knack of calling things by their wrong names; but she is a very good old soul, though I am sorry to say she does not like *me*. I am in what she would call her 'black boots.'"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that my dog Tumbie was out walking one day, and he came across her cat——"

"Well?" I said impatiently.

"Well, the cat *died*.—Mrs. Raitt is convinced that I was an accomplice to the murder, but I solemnly declare I had no hand in it.—Tumbie was out on his own hook."

"Hook!" Here was another strange word.

"Are there any Miss Raitts?" I pursued relentlessly.

"One—sole daughter of their house and home."

"And does *she* like you?" I asked with barbarous simplicity.

"I don't know. I never asked her."

"And are you married?"

"I! What put such an awful idea into your head? Have I that abject look, peculiar to Benedicts?"

"I do not understand you," I answered rather stiffly.

"No! I am a bachelor. I am a poor man, and cannot afford such a luxury as Mrs. Fitzroy."

"You do not look poor," I remarked incredulously, glancing at his handsome horse.

"Well, I am not absolutely a beggar in rags, whining for a crust; but there are degrees of poverty, though you may not know it."

"I do not know much about anything," I answered with unusual humility. "And here we are almost at home," now pointing to the great cactus hedge. "Here is our boundary."

And a very formidable affair," he rejoined.

"The hedge that guarded the sleeping princess, and impaled all her unfortunate suitors, must have been of the same material."

"Impaled! How dreadful!" I exclaimed, aghast. "Where did it happen? In Gurrumpore?"

"No," laughing loudly. "It happened in a fairy tale. Do you mean to say, that you have never read it?"

"Never. I should like to hear it."

"Mr. Hare is the latest from the nursery, and I know he will only be too delighted to relate it to you. And here he comes!"

"You are a nice child's guide, Miss Barrington," he shouted, "that I will say. Defend *me* from what you call 'good going.' I doubt if I have a whole bone in my body. I am sure I shall get what Mrs. Raitt calls 'discussion of the brain.' I've been at the bottom of two nullahs, and 'Ally Sloper' is done for. You will have to stand me a new pony."

"Well, that won't be a very serious affair," remarked his friend, gravely eyeing the animal in question. "I shall not allow you to impose on Miss Barrington—Ally Sloper's outside value

is fifteen rupees! A mere grass-cutter's 'tat,' with a head the size of a portmanteau."

This remark gave rise to a most animated discussion between the two young men, and the sound of their voices, and of our horses' hoofs, brought Peggy into the back verandah; and who shall describe her sensations, when she beheld this unexampled procession coming up the avenue?

I trotted over to her at once, and in a few hurried sentences sketched out the situation.

"God bless us!" was her first ejaculation; then her hospitable instincts coming to the fore, she added: "Take them round to the front, core of me heart, and ask them if they have a mouth on them, whilst I just whip off me old gown, and get out the best things. Here," raising her voice, "Laloo, and Ragoo, where are ye, ye idle rascallions? Can't ye come and take the gentlemen's horses?" And still calling "Laloo, and Ragoo," she hurried out of sight.

CHAPTER X.

OUR FIRST DINNER-PARTY.

“ Rich and rare were the gems she wore.”

MOORE.

As I was arraying myself for dinner, Peggy bustled quickly into my room; her face was red from cooking, although she was invested in her best dress, and a very smart new apron.

“ They are after pitching the tents in the compound,” she said, “ and the two young gentlemen are dressing there—the old wan is in his Reverence’s room. Will ye tell me, Miss Ranee, and *how* did ye ever come across them ? ”

“ We met them at Ram Tek. They were sight-seeing. Father and Colonel Raitt were at

school together; is it not extraordinary?" I answered in a series of jerky sentences—being occupied with my refractory hair; never had I found it so difficult to arrange.

"Well—well—and do ye tell me that? And they are great over the shooting already—from all I can hear. I don't doubt, but there is a cross of contrariness, sent us for our sins—there's a fate in these things; in all the time I'm here, Miss Ranee, me stores were never so low—think of it! After seventeen year—three strangers landing in on me like this—and me entirely out of vinegar, and blacking, and scented soap!" And Peggy looked absolutely tragic.

"And what is there for dinner?" I inquired anxiously (although our meals were generally conceived in a large and liberal spirit).

"Oh—soup, av coorse—Marseer out of the river, stewed parrots, an elegant young peacock, curry, black buck, teal, sweets, plantains, and water-melon—we might be worse, seeing we are taken so short—along with his Reverence's claret, they bid to do finely."

"Yes, I suppose so," I admitted, "with plenty of flowers, and the silver-branch candlesticks."

"I don't care a hair about the dinner," said Peggy recklessly. "What is troubling me the most is yourself; sure you have not a tack to wear! What is to be done with you at all? The only decent thing you have is your new blue habit."

"Habit, indeed! There's the pink satin," I began eagerly.

"Hush! never throw an eye to *that*; one would be as mad-looking as the other. You will just have to do as you are."

I gazed at my reflection most discontentedly. Alas! I did not look the least bit different to any other day, in a clean white dress, and my shabby old belt:

"I thought the eyes would just drop out of me head, when I saw you riding up the avenue, with a train after you," continued Peggy, "and officers, no less! The young one has a lovely smile, and is full of his jokes—he says he is going to learn the brogue off me. Well, honey!" turning me round as she spoke, "I suppose

your hair will do. Put this red flower in the front of your frock; I wish we had something to lighten you up."

At this instant a splendid idea flashed upon me, and laying both my hands on Peggy's shoulders, and bringing my face quite close to hers, I whispered excitedly: "The diamonds, Peggy! The Begum's necklace!"

"Musha, and so there is; but that would be going to the fair altogether! That would be *too* much dress."

"But what good are they, if they are never to be seen, or worn?" I argued impatiently. "When shall I have such an opportunity for showing them off? They may lie for another eighteen years, and not a soul cross the threshold. *Now* is my chance!"

"That's true enough!" she once more acquiesced. "I suppose you may as well give them a turn, when you can."

This meant assent, and in an amazingly short time she was carefully clasping my only bit of finery—the Begum's necklace—round my throat. And splendid it looked! How the stones flashed, and shone, they seemed *too* bright and dazzling;

my first impulse was to take it off, but vanity stayed my hand. In spite of my paltry white gown, and poor little bunch of red flowers, I now looked dressed, and equal to any occasion; the diamond necklace seemed to have given me an air of dignity, importance, and magnificence. After a steady survey, I turned to Peggy, and asked "if I would do, and how I looked?"

"Oh! an will ye not be bothering me," she answered very crossly—I believe she now most sincerely regretted her compliance. "Sure ye have *no* looks. You are just a pale, skinny, little girl. It's more to the purpose, how the *dinner* table looks! I can't trust that omadhan, Hassan, to lay a plate"—hustling me out of the room as she spoke. "The gentlemen is ready, so go away and talk to them, and don't be getting your head turned!"

Thus cautioned, and driven forth, I walked into the drawing-room, which had quite a gala look, and was most brilliantly illuminated, and found myself the last arrival. The three guests were surprisingly smartened up, and—could I believe my eyes?—father, for once, had discarded his fantastic sash and turban, and wore

a loose sack coat and trousers. He, and Colonel Raitt, and Captain Fitzroy, were discussing the Tiger carpet, and Mr. Hare stood apart, contemplating one of Peggy's pictures, with a broad grin on his face. As I entered rather consciously, I felt that every eye was now centred on me, and I thought I heard a slight exclamation of horrified disapproval escape from father. However, this *may* have been imagination; but it was certainly not imagination, that the company, who were talking so briskly together when I appeared upon the scene—were now stricken *dumb*. And how Colonel Raitt stared! indeed, so did his two companions, but they surveyed me in a less obtrusive fashion, whilst he gaped open-mouthed. Luckily the spell was broken by Hassan, who now threw back the door with the usual formula:

“Dinner ready on the table.”

Colonel Raitt advanced to me, holding out his arm, and said in a most deferential manner:

“May I take you in to dinner, Miss Barrington?”

“Thank you, no!” was my astonishing reply.

"I can walk alone quite well. Did you think I was lame, like the padre?"

"There, lead the way, Ranee," said father rather sharply, and I could tell by the tone of his voice, that I had made some terrible mistake. So waving further controversy with Colonel Raitt, I proceeded into the dining-room, as desired.

Dinner was a success. I had sufficient intelligence to grasp that agreeable fact, as I sat in unusual silence between father and Captain Fitzroy; we were badly placed; but the table was round. I had seated myself beside father, as a matter of course, and Captain Fitzroy had established himself, on my right hand—seemingly also as a matter of course. The table looked very pretty—it was decorated with Poinsettias and Palms, with true Eastern fingers; the peacock proved tender, his Reverence's claret was appreciated, and the guests themselves furnished forth the sauce, to wit, an excellent appetite. I imagine that they were all incapable of any further surprise, after their experiences of the afternoon, and they accepted the well-served

dinner, rich appointments, and excellent cooking, with placid resignation.

At length, Colonel Raitt exclaimed in a pause between the two helpings of peacock: "Just listen to that Hyena, and the Jackals across the river! Only for their giving tongue, no one would believe that we were in the heart of the jungle! This is rather different to the way we live in camp, or even at Dâk Bungalows," examining, as he spoke, a massive silver salt-cellar—and I noticed that he turned over the spoon in search of the hall-mark.

"Some Dâk Bungalows are very good," remarked Captain Fitzroy. "But the one we stopped at yesterday, carried 'roughing it,' to an extreme, and the cooking was done with kerosene oil."

"Yes, that Kansamah ought to be strangled," added Colonel Raitt with angry vehemence. I subsequently discovered, that he was rather a "bon vivant," and apt to be very querulous, under culinary disappointment.

"The usual thing," said father, "a sudden-death chicken and a curry!"

"A *curry*! yes," rejoined my neighbour;

"a curry that I shall never forget—hot enough to take the tin lining off a box, and a veteran fowl with an enormous amount of bone and muscle."

"How do you get your stores, Barrington?" inquired his old schoolfellow. "This is first-rate wine!"

"They come from Bombay to Kolar, and from Kolar by cart."

"And I suppose you procure your books, novels, and other literature in the same way, Miss Barrington?" said Captain Fitzroy.

Hitherto I had sat silent and critical—diffident of my undeveloped social powers; merely contenting myself with monosyllables, and listening with all my might; now, no longer able to restrain my tongue, I launched forth:

"Yes, we get books sometimes, but not novels—I never read them!" and I stated the fact with considerable complacency.

"Never read a novel!" he repeated, with a stare of wondering amusement. "Never read a love story! You are not in earnest?"

"Of course I am. What is a love story about? What is a novel like?"

"Can't you guess?" still looking at me fixedly. "Well, generally about a maiden more beautiful than the dawn, who meets a young man under some picturesque or thrilling circumstances. They fall madly in love; thousands of obstacles supervene in the way of their happiness; *he* goes to the wars, or he goes out of his mind; *she* becomes a Sister of Mercy, or has the small-pox! However, in the end all is satisfactorily cleared up, and they marry, and live blissfully ever after."

"And do novels end like *this* as a rule?"

"Yes; ninety per cent. wind up with a wedding."

"But I would like to hear how the people get on afterwards?"

"Ah, afterwards, they are not nearly so interesting; the interest ceases, and the story ends, when they are married; and I believe it is just as well! I should be afraid of discovering my favourite heroine throwing plates at her husband, or screaming at the servants."

"And have you a favourite heroine?"

"Many," he rejoined expressively.

“And which do you like best of all? What is she called?”

He turned a little more towards me, and said with the air of imparting a profound confidence :

“My favourite heroine *used* to be called Rebecca, daughter of Isaac of York ; recently she has been superseded by the Fair One with the Golden Locks !”

“Oh, well, I am not much wiser than I was before,” I retorted rather impatiently ; but apparently Mr. Hare knew all about her, for I noticed that he was grinning from ear to ear.

“What is your favourite study?” continued Captain Fitzroy.

“I read travels, essays, biographies, and history. I like history best.”

“Yes? Well, I dare say you absorb a good deal of fiction there.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, aghast. “Is not all history *true*?”

“I am afraid not. I am sorry to inform you that many of our cherished illusions, are gradually being exploded.”

"I don't understand you."

"Well, you know the pretty story of Helen of Troy?"

I nodded.

"Some unpleasant German critics declare, that she must have been *sixty* years old at the time of the siege; and I fancy that the affection of her suitors—if she had any—must have been platonic! Then as to Cleopatra and the earring, her organisation was truly remarkable, if it enabled her to quaff off nitric acid, which is the only fluid in which a pearl will dissolve. To come down to comparatively recent times, it is known that Fair Rosamond, instead of being poisoned by Queen Eleanor, died at a good old age, in Godstow Convent."

"Don't!" I exclaimed indignantly. "I won't hear any more."

"Then you would rather that she *had* partaken of the cup of cold poison?" he asked maliciously.

I made no reply. Captain Fitzroy made fun of history, possibly he was making fun of *me*! and for some seconds I maintained a stately silence.

"May I presume to remark your magnificent

necklace?" he asked in a tone of exaggerated deference: "you look like the Queen of Diamonds."

"Do you think so?" I rejoined rather stiffly; but I listened with delighted complacency, to his unbounded admiration of my dazzling ornament. The necklace had a curious effect on me—when I thought of it, or touched it, I felt intoxicated with pride and arrogance.

"An heirloom?" inquired my companion.

"No; it was given to father by a native prince. He rather wanted to get rid of it—he said it was unlucky; and the centre stone is called the Evil Eye."

"A nice respectable name! and it has an odd, fiery expression of its own. However, I am sure its evil propensities and ill luck, will vanish now that it is in *your* possession," he concluded politely.

"I hope so," I exclaimed so fervently, that he smiled. "This is the first time I have ever worn it."

"Well, you will have lots of opportunities of displaying it by-and-by."

"How?" I asked brusquely.

"You don't mean to say that you are going

to be buried alive in the jungle all your life?" he returned rather sharply.

"I don't know what you mean by being buried alive, but I know that I shall always live, and no doubt, *die* here."

"Nonsense! your father would never be so selfish——"

"Hush," I interrupted, "father is not selfish: you must not say such things."

"And are you content?" looking at me narrowly.

"Not always," I confessed. "When father is from home, and I am alone with Peggy for months, I often long for wings, to fly away," here I lowered my voice to a whisper in case my parent should hear me, and added, "and see the world."

"I don't wonder," rejoined my companion; "it would be odd if you did not."

Meanwhile sport, and tiger stories, had been raging between the two elders and Mr. Hare, and Colonel Raitt's loud voice had almost drowned our tamer conversation. (N.B.—His idea of conversation was discussion.) But now, Captain Fitzroy was to be drawn into the general *mêlée*,

and Colonel Raitt, suddenly leaning over, said eagerly:

“I say, Fitzroy, what’s that they tell about the tigers near Mittoor?”

“Oh, you mean on the line of rail! They have eaten every single pointsman, and now they sit on the embankment, licking their lips at the guards of passing trains.”

“No, no, but bar all chaff.”

“Well, then, bar all chaff. They say—mind you *I* don’t say it—that the pointsmen on the Mittoor line are now kept in strong iron cages; completely reversing the *old* order of things, and that the tiger brings his little family to inspect them—precisely as we do, to his relations at the Zoo!”

“How extraordinary!” I remarked with much vivacity.

“Ah, Miss Barrington, if you enjoy *really* fine tiger stories, you should know Colonel Bouncer of Gurrumpore,” said Mr. Hare. “He tells the grandest yarns in India.”

“Does he? Do you know any of them?” I eagerly inquired.

“I think I could manage to remember one

or two—but not to do them justice. One, that I can never forget, is about his killing a twelve-foot tiger with a toothpick.”

“A what?” I almost screamed.

“A toothpick,” he repeated with the utmost gravity. “He, I mean of course Colonel Bouncer, was walking through the jungle one day, quite unarmed and unprepared, when he was suddenly confronted by a monstrous tiger, who sprang upon him with a horrible roar, and, with one stroke of its paw, laid him low. As the brute stood over him, lashing his tail, in anticipation of a good meal, Colonel Bouncer naturally believed that his last moment had arrived; but a happy idea struck him, he thought of his sharp gold tooth-pick, the gift of his grandmother; in a second it was out, he had an extensive knowledge of anatomy, and feeling for the tiger’s heart, he plunged the tooth-pick up to the hilt, and without a groan or struggle the king of the forest fell dead.”

“That’s all very well in its way,” remarked Captain Fitzroy condescendingly, “but *I* prefer his bird stories. Miss Barrington,” turning and addressing me, “I’m sure you would like to hear about Colonel Bouncer’s pet minar. It was the

very apple of his eye, and talked fluent English with a London accent; it could repeat whatever it heard, and, whatever it did not immediately reproduce, was stored up in its mind! One day, one fatal day, the bird was missing, it had either been stolen or it had taken French leave, and flown away. Colonel Bouncer was inconsolable—inconsolable for weeks. However, one evening, he was riding through a forest, and was rather startled by hearing a human voice; presently he came to a little glade or opening, and there he beheld, to his intense surprise, a large circle of minars, and perched in the midst was his own long-lost bird—it *was teaching the others the Lord's Prayer!* What do you say to that?" inquired Captain Fitzroy impressively.

"I say—I say—that I don't believe it!" I answered impetuously; "no, nor the tiger-story either! What a wicked man! How *could* he tell such dreadful untruths?"

"Oh, poor old chap, he has told them so often that he has come to believing in them most firmly himself. There's something in *that*."

"He was in great form at your mess, not long ago. He told a tremendous stretcher about

a flock of pigeons—you remember it, don't you, Fitzroy?" said Colonel Raitt—"about a cloud of pigeons that actually darkened the sun, and they all pitched in his compound in such numbers that you could not see a blade of grass!"

"I remember it well," responded Mr. Hare, with a nod and a grin. "And he went in to fetch his gun, and fired among them, and was frightfully riled with Fitzroy, for, when he looked round with a proud air and said, 'Now, gentlemen, how many do you think I bagged?' Fitz instantly answered, '*Ten thousand!*' So, just to disappoint him, he roared out, 'Not one, sir—not a feather!' And he would not tell another yarn that night! It was too bad of you, Fitz! He knew you were pulling his leg!"

Pulling his leg! What an outrageous thing to do! But before I had time to make any inquiry or observation, I caught father's eye. He was looking at me most significantly. What did he want?

"Ranee," he said, "we are going to smoke. Would you not like to go into the drawing-room?"

"Oh, no, thank you," was my artless re-

joinder; "I would much rather remain here. You know I like the smell of cigars."

"Nevertheless, my dear, you will be better in the other room," he said gravely; and I read in his face that I had committed *another* frightful social enormity, and that I was to depart. So I rose, with as much dignity as I could muster, and Captain Fitzroy also got up and walked to the door, and opened it for me to pass out.

Was this a joke? Was it a signal that he considered it was high time for me to be off, and that they were delighted to be rid of me?

I glanced at him suspiciously, as he stood erect, door in hand. No; luckily for him, his ever-smiling eyes were perfectly unembarrassed, and his face was as solemn, as the proverbial owl.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROSE OF THE DESERT.

“Was it a vision or a waking dream?
Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep?”
KEATS.

COFFEE was served outside, and chairs were placed at the edge of the bank, overlooking the river, and here I was joined—in a flatteringly short space of time—by the two young men.

“I found this guitar,” said Mr. Hare. “It was hanging in the verandah. Of course you play, Miss Barrington?”

Now this guitar had been a present from Peggy, after one of her pilgrimages. It was a nice, portable, musical instrument, and I be-

lieve she supposed that possessing a guitar, and playing on it, were one and the same thing.

"No," I replied. "But I hope *you* do."

"Yes, and sings like a nightingale," said his friend. "Peter, strike up. The moon, the river, and last, not least, the presence of a lady should inspire you."

"We are all musical," remarked Peter, carefully screwing up the strings. "Fitzroy here fiddles like a Paganini or Nero; and you should just hear Colonel Raitt singing——"

"Or rather you *should not*. Don't ask him, Miss Barrington, if you will be advised by me; he roars like one of his own tigers. And here he comes," as Colonel Raitt and father appeared in the verandah, and came over and joined our circle by the river-bank.

"Colonel Raitt tells me, that your leave is up in a week," said the latter, seating himself by Captain Fitzroy; "and if you and Mr. Hare can manage to stay for three days, I think I could show you some sport, in the shape of a tiger or two."

Naturally Captain Fitzroy and his friend could

stay, and were full of gratitude and eager anticipations.

"You see," continued father, "you are strangers, and don't know the country—I *do*. I have lived here for seventeen years, and I am looked upon as a lord of the soil, and all the tigers and big game within fifty miles are preserved solely for *me*. Shikarris would take your money, and tell you lots of lies, but they would never dare to beat for one of *my* tigers! I know a place, about a day's march from this, where we ought to get something—I have made arrangements now, and we start at daylight to-morrow."

"Good Lord!" yelled Colonel Raitt, bounding out of his chair, upsetting a table and coffee-cups. "What's this?—A tiger here?"

"It's only my tame panther," I explained serenely. "She is like a cat, and follows me all over the place. She is quite harmless. I have had her since she was the size of a kitten."

I was amazed at the old man's unworthy panic, for which *I* could see no reason.

"A nice kitten! I don't like the look of

her at all. Send the brute away. Call her off," he cried excitedly, as Jaina now commenced to rub herself affectionately against his legs.

"I'll take her away if you like," rising and dragging her by the collar. "But she must do her tricks first, and show every one how accomplished she is.—Now, Jaina, die for your country."

Jaina obediently flung herself down with a heavy thump, and closed her eyes. After this, I made her sit up—which she did very badly—and jump through a hoop—which she accomplished very gracefully. Then father, seeing that his old schoolfellow still looked exceedingly unhappy, and was in a state of grotesque alarm, said :

"There, Ranee, that will do. Take her away."

And accordingly, with my handkerchief run through her collar, I led her off to her bed, in the stables, escorted by Mr. Peter Hare, who assured me that I ought to exhibit Jaina, and that "the Lion Queen was not in the same street with me." Here was another of his dark sayings. What street?

"I see you have a boat on the river," he

remarked as he sauntered back. "Suppose we go for a row. It will be awfully jolly and cool. Do come."

I did not need any pressing, I was very fond of boating, and three minutes later, saw us floating down the Karrhan. Peter rowed well—with long, easy strokes; whilst I reclined in the stern, with my diamonds flashing in the moonlight, and the tiller ropes in my lap.

"Turn about is fair play," said my companion, nodding up at the party on the bank.

"Why, what do you mean?" I asked innocently.

"I only mean, that Fitzroy had your company all the way home—that he sat beside you at dinner, and never let me get in a word edge-ways—and it's *my* innings now."

"What does 'Innings' mean—and 'Jolly'—and 'Hook'?"

"Oh! life is a great deal too short to explain things," said Mr. Hare lazily. "Let me sing you a little song instead."

I have no doubt, that Peter knew that his charming tenor voice, was a powerful agent in

his favour, and he speedily shipped his oars, slung the guitar ribbon over his shoulder, and struck up "Oft in the Stilly Night." I recognised the words, they were Moore's, and leaning back with one hand rippling through the tepid water, I gave myself up to the delights of the moment. Surely it was not I—Ranee Barrington, who was drifting down the Karrhan—*vis-à-vis* with a strange young man, who was singing melting love songs to the old guitar?—for "Oft in the Stilly Night" had been followed by "Love's Young Dream," and a charming Serenade. My thoughts recurred to the fortune-teller's prediction. This undoubtedly was "a great event," and was not the moon shining full overhead?

Suddenly Mr. Hare ceased to sing—laid the guitar across his knees, and said:

"I think we have the best of it down here, instead of being up above, listening to old Raitt's everlasting Shikar talk! Don't you find it deadly dull here, Miss Barrington?"

"Sometimes."

"By Jove! When girls call Gurrumpore slow, I wonder what they would say to *this*!"

"Are there many pretty girls at Gurrumpore?"

"No-o. Rather a scratch pack."

"A *what?*"

"Well—a fiddle-headed lot."

"*Fiddle-headed!* I don't understand—am *I* fiddle-headed?" I asked, as I dabbled my hand in the waters of the Karrhan.

"Rather not," impressively.

"What would you call me then?"

"I'd call you an uncommonly pretty girl," was the bold reply. "I'd call you the Rose of the Desert!"

I sat up, dried my hand deliberately, and looked at him steadily. He appeared to be quite serious.

"I am only giving you a plain answer, to your plain question, and you look as if you could shoot me." And he laughed a laugh, of unabashed audacity.

"How do the girls at Gurrumpore pass their time?" I asked, with my usual abruptness—I could not afford to quarrel with him about nonsense. My object was to utilise every precious moment, and gather up as much information

about the outer world as I could possibly scrape together, to ruminate upon, when they had departed.

"They have tiffin parties, tennis parties, tea parties, dinners, and dances, and lots of jolly new frocks, and sundry flirtations."

"And what is a flirtation?"

"Oh, Fitzroy will tell you what it is, if you ask him! If you appealed to Fitzroy to define it, perhaps he would say that you and I were carrying on one now."

"Would he really?" I exclaimed in intense surprise. "Is going out in a boat, a flirtation?"

"Not always; but at any rate Fitz would be wrong. You and I don't know how to flirt! We are far too young and innocent, are not we?"

"Never mind what we are, but tell me some more about Gurrumpore," I said imperiously.

"Oh, it's a capital little station, sociable and sporting, cheap and *not* nasty, and suits me down to the ground."

"And what is your regiment like?"

"Magnificent fellows, raised from the old

Mahratta Horse, you know.—But it was the uniform, that fetched me.”

“Fetched you from where?”

“Oh, I say!” shaking his head—“attracted me. We wear turbans, and heaps of gold embroidery, and leopard skins. You should just see me, in full war-paint, and as to Fitz——!”

Apparently “Fitz” was too splendid for words. “He is a friend of yours, is he not?”

“Yes; we live together. He bosses the show, and keeps me up to the mark, and out of scrapes.”

“What scrapes?” I questioned, with ruthless curiosity.

“Well, scrapes pecuniary, and scrapes matrimonial. I’m horribly susceptible, I can tell you. He is my skipper too. He is a capital fellow, a ripping good rider: every one likes Fitz.”

“Why?”

“Oh, I can’t explain things — well — but men like him, because he is so straight, and such a good chap, and such first-rate company. Women like him, because he is good-looking and amusing, and he is not a bit afraid of

them. All the same, he is not a marrying man — and if there was a regimental matrimonial lottery to-morrow he would not fetch four annas!”

“I don’t understand you in the least, you might just as well talk Chinese!” I said impatiently.

“You can understand, perhaps, that Fitz is *poor*? Once he was well off, and in a crack regiment at home, and tooled their drag. Now, he has nothing but his pay, and all he has to his name, is an old bamboo cart worth thirty rupees, and a horse that he got a great bargain, because it bolts! He is as poor as Job, and it speaks well for our single-mindedness when I tell you, that he is one of the most popular fellows in Gurrumpore! And that there is not a girl in the place, would not marry him if he asked her.”

“I don’t believe that,” I said indignantly, “they cannot *all* be in love with him! Now tell me about some other people.”

“Well, to begin with our colonel, his name is Fred Gimlette; he is a most distinguished officer; his breast is quite plated with medals

—if he gets any more, we must stick them on his back; he is a great warrior, and we are all very proud of him.—And then there is Mrs. Gimlette, his wife—a fine old soldier, *too*.” And he grinned ridiculously.

“Has *she* fought battles?” I asked in awestruck amazement.

“Only with her servants, and her tradespeople. She is a regular character, and has quite a craze for buying and selling. If she has nothing of her own on hand, she will trade for other people, from a pair of horses, to a pair of scissors—it’s all one to her, and is her sole amusement. She let Fitz and me in for an awful old lamp, that blows up when it’s lighted.”

“What a dreadful person! And who else is there in your regiment?”

“There’s Sadler, our horsey man; he has not a single idea beyond the stable; and Conroy—Conroy is a nailing good cricketer, and is very well in some ways; but he is a sponge.”

“*A sponge!*” I echoed.

“Yes; he is no worse off than I am, and

yet he never has a single thing to his name. He indents on my uniform—rather hard lines on my kit, having to do for *two*—thank goodness my boots won't fit him! he borrows my socks, gloves, and shirts. He has had a port-manteau and cheroot case of mine so long, that he believes they are his own. He broke the knees of Fitzroy's Tandstikker——”

“What's that?” I interrupted.

“Tandstikker is an A 1 pony—a country bred; and as his two previous masters both got married, and Tandstikker was a great feature, and factor in their courtships—hence his name,—however, there's no fear of Fitzroy, *he* is warranted not to ignite. Conroy took the pony out of the stable one night, without the formality of asking leave, and galloped him round the guards, and came to awful grief in the dark over a stone drain. He had also a pleasant habit, of calling every afternoon after we had gone out, and telling our butler to give him a cheroot and a ‘peg’: it saved him getting them at the club house, where he would have to pay. However, I soon stopped *that* little game,” he concluded triumphantly.

"Then you don't like Mr. Conroy?" I said bluntly.

"Yes; I do in a way. He is very good-natured. You can't put him out, however much you slang him. He is a capital cricketer, and an immense favourite with outsiders—of course *they* don't know his little peculiarities. He is always ready to exercise a fellow's horse (saddle or harness), or to ride a race, and he gets lots of mounts with the bobbery pack. 'Con' certainly manages to do his amusements cheaply.—He pays for nothing; and, talking of payment, what are you going to pay me for these songs?"

"In what way?"

"You might give me those jolly flowers in your dress?"

"But they would be no use to you—you can't wear them;" nevertheless holding out one of them as I spoke.

"Oh, can't I?" sticking it in his button-hole. "Looks rather neat, eh? We must have you down to Gurrumpore this cold weather, and show you something of life and society. I shall keep this flower until we meet again, as a souvenir

of you and of this lovely night." And once more taking up the guitar, he warbled—

"Do you recall that night in June
Upon the Danube river ;

"Ahem, the Karrhan I mean," shaking his head.

"I'll ne'er forget that night in June
Upon the Karrhan river.
Our boat kept measure with its oars——"

"There's father's whistle," I interrupted, half rising. "We must go back at once."

Mr. Hare muttered something that sounded uncommonly like—

"*Blow* his whistle!"

And then calmly proceeded to argue as follows: "Firstly, it might not be father's whistle at all. Secondly, that if it was, how did I know that it was intended to summon *me*? Thirdly, that we were very happy as we were!"

After a most animated altercation, in which I signally routed my companion, we got the boat's head round, and rowed slowly homewards; at the top of the steps we encountered Captain

Fitzroy, apparently awaiting us. He glanced at me, and then looked very hard at Peter—looked at him *twice*, when he beheld my flower so jauntily displayed in his button-hole. And it occurred to me that he was not altogether pleased with his friend. What had he done? However, all he said was :

“Well, Peter, I need not *ask* if you have enjoyed yourself! Perhaps, now, you will kindly make your singing more general and give us a song up here.”

“It’s rather late,” objected Peter.

“Not a bit of it. Never too late to *mend*!” said the other significantly.

“Yes, Hare, sing us something, like a good fellow,” chimed in Colonel Raitt.

He and father had been going over old days, so Captain Fitzroy whispered to me, but that almost every reminiscence my parent put forward, had been either flatly contradicted, or largely revised. Nevertheless I had never seen him so animated or so cheerful.

“Well, what is it to be?” said Peter, lazily leaning back in a low chair—“A Romany Lass?”

“No ; give us that thing from ‘Departmental

Ditties,' that you put to a tune—'The Lover's Litany.'"

After a rather sharp discussion, for and against, Mr. Hare succumbed to his comrades' wishes, twanged a few careless chords, and cleared his throat, and having premised that he did not hold himself responsible for the sentiments in the song, commenced the following ditty :

Eyes of grey, a sodden quay,
Driving rain and falling tears,
As the steamer wears to sea
In a parting storm of tears.
Sing, for Faith and Hope are high,
None so true as you and I.
Sing the Lover's Litany :
"Love like ours can never die."

Eyes of black, a throbbing keel,
Milky foam to left and right ;
Whispered converse near the wheel,
In the brilliant tropic night.
Cross that rules the Southern sky !
Stars that sweep, and wheel, and fly !
Hear the Lover's Litany :
"Love like ours can never die."

Eyes of blue, the Simla hills,
Silvered with the moonlight hoar,
Pleading of the waltz that thrills,
Dies and echoes round Benmore.

“ Mabel,” “ officers,” “ good-bye,”
 Glamour, wine, and witchery—
 On my soul’s sincerity,
 “ Love like ours can never die.”

Eyes of brown—a dusty plain,
 Split and parched with heat of June,
 Flying hoof and tightened rein,
 Hearts that beat the old, old tune.
 Side by side the horses fly,
 Frame we now the old reply
 Of the Lover’s Litany :
 “ Love like ours can never die.”

Here Mr. Hare stopped, and would have led us to suppose, that this was the end of the song.

“ Go on, Peter,” said his friend, “ don’t shirk the last verse—the last verse is the best of all.”

“ It’s too long,” objected his victim ; nevertheless he once more struck up,

Maidens of your charity !
 Pity my most luckless state
 Four times Cupid’s debtor I—
 Bankrupt in quadruplicate.
 Spite of Cupid’s perjury,
 If another maid should try,
 I dare sing the Litany,
 Sing the Lover’s Litany,
 “ Love like ours can never die.”

“Ah, very good—capital,” said Colonel Raitt, knocking the ash off his cheroot, and nodding his bald head approvingly.

“Very good, is it not?” agreed Captain Fitzroy, playfully patting his comrade’s shoulder. “And sung by the original hero; the author had Mr. Peter Hare before his mind’s eye, when he wrote it.”

“Come, now, I like that,” said Peter rather sulkily.

“Only that he toned down the sketch,” continued his comrade pleasantly. And he looked at me with a meaning smile and said, “Peter is dangerous.”

Did he intend me to take this as a joke, or a warning, or what?

“Ranee,” said father rather sharply, “we start at daybreak to-morrow, and we are going to turn in quite early—you had better go to bed.”

Thus somewhat peremptorily dismissed, I rose obediently, bade a general good-night, and retired to my own apartment, took off my glittering necklace, and sat down; I got no further with my toilette, but was still fully dressed, and busily

reviewing the events of this most wonderful day when Peggy entered—twenty times in the twenty-four hours she was in and out of my room.

“Blessed hour!” she ejaculated. “And are you not in bed yet? Where is your necklace? Oh, I see—Come, take off your dress. Where’s the flowers that was in it?”

“Everything was very nice—they were delighted with the dinner,” I remarked, with an artful desire to turn the conversation.

“Oh, and they had a good right to be,” rather crossly. “And aren’t you destroyed, with the *thirst*?”

“Thirst, no. Why should I be thirsty?” I asked innocently.

“From all—you talked,” she returned; “your tongue was going like a clapper.”

“What do you think of them, Peg?” I inquired, with another effort to change the conversation.

“Oh, faix, Colonel Raitt talks as much as yourself! and has a voice, that would split a pitcher. The wan they call Fitzroy, is a handsome man, and looks like a soldier; he has a

merry eye of his own, that little escapes. The young one is a boy—and as plain as a hape of stones; but his singing bates all—he would coax the fish out of the water! And he seems a pious young man—what was that about a Litany? I could not rightly catch the words.”

“It was not at all a pious song, Peggy,” I answered, with an involuntary smile.

“And who was in the boat with him, and you?” she continued peremptorily.

“No one.”

“And what did you do with the flowers, eh?”

“I gave them to him,” I answered boldly.

“Oh! I declare this sort of work won’t do at all, Miss Ranee. Is *that* the sort of girl you are? You have no call to be boating with gentlemen, and giving them flowers—a nice name—a real nice name you will be getting yourself, if you don’t mind.”

“Mr. Hare has given me a very nice name already,” I answered rather saucily.

“‘The wild girl of the woods,’ I’ll go bail!”

“No, indeed; and as you would never guess

it, I may as well tell you at once. He said I was 'the Rose of the Desert.' Is not it a pretty idea? What do you think of *that*?"

"I think Mr. Hare was making rare sport of you," rejoined Peggy, with angry promptitude. "Rose, indeed! without a tint of colour in your face. It's a *yellow* rose he manes."

And with this blighting interpretation, of my first charming compliment, the disagreeable old woman blew out the candle, and left me in the dark.

CHAPTER XII.

“PRINCESS OF THE JUNGLE.”

“I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute.”

COWPER.

THE shooting-party started long before dawn, such was their zeal—started hours before I was awake, and remained absent for three whole days. At length news arrived, in the mysterious way in which news travels from mouth to mouth, and village to village, in India, that the Tiger Lord (meaning father) had had good sport, and was returning along the river with two dead tigers. As soon as the sun was on the decline, I mounted Cassim, and set off in the direction from which the Shikar party were ex-

pected. They were coming from the dense line of forest that lay at the foot of some distant hills. Few people, (comparatively), are acquainted with an Indian jungle. Do those who have never travelled through one, picture miles of low, green scrub, thousands of black boulder-stones, and herds of graceful antelopes; or great stretches of tall grass, intersected by sandy water-courses; fields of heavy-headed Jawarri, ravaged by flocks of green parrots; crops of yellow linseed, dotted with greedy, black-faced monkeys? Do people imagine, leagues of dense primeval forest, with gigantic flowering trees—trees almost smothered in the embrace of fragrant white creepers, trees with pink blossoms, and leaves like brown plush; where the Teak and Neem, Peepul and Bamboo, flourish together, and the Sensitive Plant grows, undisturbed, to the height of several feet? Do people picture, the shady, rocky nullahs, where the tiger lies in ambush, and the maidenhair fern carpets all the damp, dim nooks? or the brilliant blue jays, golden orioles, doves, peacocks, and irrepressible “Why-did-you-do-it” birds? No; no one who who has never seen it can possibly conjure up

before their mind's eye, the silence, the dignity, and the beauty, of an Indian jungle!

Through such a jungle I rode along, now at a canter, now at a walk, for fully ten miles, and at last the faint sounds of jubilant "tom-toms" fell upon my ear, and I halted by the broken wall of an ancient tank—once brimful, and covered with delicate pink water-lilies; now, thanks to the hot weather, empty, dry, and baked. Presently the procession came in view—first, the two young men, riding rather in advance; then the tom-toms, rending the hot, still air; next the bodies of the slain, each slung to a stout pole, and carried by twenty coolies; then, carts with tents and baggage; lastly Colonel Raitt and father, followed by an enthusiastic crowd.

"Well," I called out, "so you have had good sport!"

"*Grand!*" roared Colonel Raitt. "I have shot a monster—a man-eater ten feet long!"

After a few minutes of somewhat incoherent conversation, interrupted by sudden bursts of triumph from Colonel Raitt, father said rather impatiently:

"Come, Ranee, it will soon be dark; we must push on. You will hear it all at home."

"Long before *that*, Miss Barrington!" said Peter eagerly. "We won't put your patience to such a terrible test. Come and ride in front with us—you will lead the van nobly!—and we will tell you all about our brave deeds, as we pursue the line of march."

In another moment, I was riding at the head of the procession, well in advance of the tom-toms, and with a cavalier on either side.

"It was your father who killed the large tiger," said Peter. "Colonel Raitt pinked him slightly, but you know, first *hit* gets the skin."

"Yes; and I was surprised to hear that the brute had grown a foot since his death," added Captain Fitzroy very gravely.

"Oh, my dear fellow! he will have grown three more by the time we get to Gurrumpore."

"And who shot the other tiger?" I inquired.

"I did," said Mr. Hare triumphantly.

"We flushed the first tiger not far from a riverside village about twenty miles off. He was more than suspected of being a man-eater: how-

ever, he did not disdain a nice young bullock we had kindly tied up, and killed and ate the best part of him last night."

"Now, Fitz," broke in his comrade, "give *me* a chance. You know I can tell a story twice as well as you can."

"It depends upon what you call *a story*," retorted the other with a laugh. "However, all right, fire away."

"Well, you see, Miss Barrington," he began volubly, "Fitz and I were perched up on the same machan, in one tree, and the two old gentlemen were in another, and the jungle, where we knew 'stripes' was lying up, was beaten by a hundred coolies with tom-toms, and crackers, and shouts, and yells, and great throwing of stones and clods of earth. At last, after a ghastly wait of about two hours, not daring to smoke or speak, I was just thinking that it wasn't quite good enough, sitting on a narrow shelf, concealed like an owl in an ivy bush, and I would nip down and stretch my legs; when there was a crash in the under-wood, and out galloped a large tiger. Old Tommy fired and grazed him, and then your father rolled him over very neatly, with a bullet

in his brain. The greatest excitement naturally ensued, and we all descended to examine the slain. He looked a huge brute as he lay stretched out, and Colonel Raitt was nearly delirious with delight. 'I wish there were a few more to shoot, now I have my eye in,' he said, as he peacocked round his quarry. The wish was barely out of his mouth, when a beater dashed into the little circle, and scattered us with one word—

“‘*Tigress!*’

“How I got back into our machan, I cannot tell—perhaps Fitz knows—and we were hardly there before we caught sight of a long orange body creeping through the jungle like a great cat.”

“I could distinctly hear the thumping of your heart, my friend,” supplemented Captain Fitzroy.

“I dare say. I don’t deny, that I was in a most deadly funk. She advanced into the open space, looked about her, and lashed her tail as much as to say, ‘What’s all this row about?’ Then she gave a roar that nearly shook me out of the machan, when she became aware of the corpse of her lord and master. She approached

it softly, smelt all round it, and then her roars were appalling—rage and grief combined. After this, she began to sniff about, presumably for *us*. And old Tommy—I mean Colonel Raitt—who was not back in his machan, but the very first tree to hand—dropped his rifle, he was in such a mortal funk; and no wonder, for his perch was a mere sapling. This performance brought the beast just nicely opposite to where we were posted,—only ten feet above her. I fired in a flurry, and hit her in the shoulder; the shot capsized her, and she rolled over, tearing the wound with her teeth. Then she got up again, caught sight of us, and came straight at our miserable lop-sided machan."

"A charging tiger is a wonderful sight," remarked Captain Fitzroy; "with ears laid back—mouth open."

"*Will* you shut up, and let me finish?" said his comrade impatiently. "She made one bound, Miss Barrington, and actually got her claws on to the edge of our little platform; and I shall never forget what I felt, when I saw her yellow eyes, and felt her hot breath, within two feet of me! Luckily Fitzroy was ready, and fired

both barrels into her head, and she fell back plump—stone dead—carrying the machan and us, with her in the fall; and there we all lay in a heap. *However*, when we had extricated ourselves, beyond a few bruises, and scratches, and an awful fright, we were not a bit the worse.”

“A most thrilling adventure, Mr. Hare,” I remarked. “So you and Colonel Raitt, have each got a fine tiger.”

“Yes,” he replied, with a grin of preposterous complacency.

“And they were *both* killed by other people!”

“What a nasty one for me, Miss Barrington! And I had intended, to have offered you the claws and whiskers.”

“Pray don’t. Tigers’ skins and claws are no novelty to *us*,” I answered ungratefully.

“After this awful snub, I suppose I ought to hide my diminished head. Perhaps you will be so kind as to imagine, that I have made some effective repartee.”

“I have *no* imagination,” I returned with barbarous candour.

“Does your father always shoot from

machans — like to-day?" inquired Captain Fitzroy.

"No; but he wanted to make sure of some sport. He has no elephant, and sometimes—indeed generally—he goes on foot."

"An uncommonly risky proceeding."

"I say, Fitz," broke in his friend, "it's your turn now. I know you had an awkward adventure once, with a man-eater. Tell us about it; something or other, *pour passer le temps*."

"I am sure Miss Barrington is sick of sporting stories, and this one, does not redound particularly to my credit."

"But I should like to hear it, all the same," I assured him with unintentional rudeness.

"It's not much of a tale, I must prepare you. It happened some years ago, when I was particularly young and foolish, and was what is called a Griffin——"

"Come, that will do for a preface. Go on with the story; you are no Griffin *now*," said Mr. Hare.

"Well, I was out shooting—with two other fellows, Grey and Vandeleur—on two months' leave. Grey, the head of our party, was a

splendid sportsman, and thanks to him, and to our being in a capital jungle, we had extraordinary luck. I actually bagged four tigers myself, and went up forty degrees in my own estimation—having never killed anything previously that was bigger than a rabbit—and I was a long way, the keenest and the most foolhardy, of the whole party.—We were on the look-out for a notorious man-eater, and, after a forced march, had camped at the foot of a great range of low-wooded hills, overlooking a fertile country; but most of the crops stood uncut, many roads were entirely deserted, and five or six villages had been abandoned, owing to the depredations of this tiger. He was said to have carried off, at least, a hundred and fifty people, from fields, off carts, and even out of their huts. A large reward was on his head—many paragraphs had appeared about him in the paper—and the fame of ‘the Korai man-eater’ was spread abroad from Calcutta to Bombay. For my own part, my greatest ambition, was to be known as the fellow, who had rid the country of this pest! He was said to be recognisable, by a crooked toe, that stuck out quite horizontally from one

of his fore paws—also he was a large lank brute, with a deep wound in his back, where a hatchet had been flung at him, as he carried off a woman. We were now within his so-called ‘beat,’ a radius of fifteen miles, and although my companions resolved to rest for the remainder of the day after a long march—rest was out of the question for *me*. I felt as fresh as paint, and started off alone in the afternoon, with a shot gun over my shoulder—to explore the surrounding country, and to bring in ‘khubber’ of the tiger—and wild pigeons for the pot. After a couple of miles of tramp, through Bamboo jungle, I came to the dry bed of a river, overshadowed with fine forest trees—here and there, in the white sand, were a few pools of water, and round the pools, were dozens of tracks: Pig, Sambur, Hyena, Jackal. As I plunged along in the fine deep sand, I suddenly saw something that made my heart beat a little faster,—the pugs of a large tiger—so large, they seemed the circumference of a plate; they were going right up the nullah, and were not two hours old! I looked a little closer, and sure enough, one of them left a distinct impression

of the notorious *crooked toe*! I was on the track of the Korai man-eater. The pugs were easily followed along the sand for fifty yards, then they went up a bank, and were by no means, so readily traced; however, with patience and observation,—learned from my friend Grey, I made them out here, and there, for nearly half a mile. When I came to a rough country road, bordered with Bamboos, some one had recently been cutting them, for a pile lay on the road—a bill-hook, yes! and a man's turban. Next I noticed a great splash of blood further on; the man's waist-cloth stretched, and unwound like a snake. I went further among the bamboos—and, I won't mind telling you what I saw—I felt cold and queer, and full of both horror and fury,—there was no sign of the monster. Presently my anger cooled, and I began to retrace my steps, and to realise, that I was a long way from camp, with only a shot gun in my hand. I had gone about two miles, walking quickly, in the direction of our halting place, full of my discovery, and burning for the morrow's beat. The jungle at sundown is silent—as I am sure you know, Miss Barrington—

silent and lonely, and I was a good deal startled by hearing the sudden sharp snap of a twig, at some distance behind me, just as if some one had stepped on it. I glanced round, and saw a low, lank shape, distinctly defined against the red sky. It was creeping along stealthily and swiftly, just as I have seen a cat creeping after a mouse. I had been tracking the Korai man-eater—and he was now tracking *me*.—I cannot describe what I felt. My gun was of no use, merely charged with shot; to run would be instant destruction, so I walked on very rapidly, till I came to a bend or corner where I was out of sight, and then I took to my heels, and fled for my life; but running was no good, I had barely time to scramble into a tree, when the tiger was beneath it. There I sat, astride a branch,—a prisoner. It got darker and darker, and I could only make out a shape, and a pair of greedy, glittering eyes. I shall never forget that night, and when dawn came——"

"You awoke, and it was all a *dream*," interrupted his friend facetiously.

"I did nothing of the sort," he retorted

rather shortly. "I was released at daybreak by Grey and Vandeleur, who had been in a mortal fright about me—the tiger was shot the same day," thus winding up his tale with extraordinary abruptness.

"Who shot him?" I asked with unquenchable curiosity.

"Well, I did; but we put three or four bullets into him before he was despatched."

"And did you not feel very proud?" I inquired in astonishment.

"Not nearly as proud, as I expected to feel. The sensation of being chased by an animal, who wants to make a supper off you, is rather lowering to a man's self-esteem—one has shared the experience, of a Rat or a Mouse."

Meanwhile as we rode along, we skirted large villages, passed through small ones, and met on the open plains, many flocks, and herds, pacing solemnly homewards. In the villages, and on the plains alike, all who witnessed our triumphal procession, paused and gazed on us admiringly, including the pariah Dogs, hideous blue Buffaloes, and even the indolent, self-possessed Crows. When we reached the high

road, we encountered great trains of heavily-laden carts, rumbling along at the rate of two miles an hour, carrying traffic from point to point, in lieu of the unromantic railway. In many cases, the drivers were sound asleep under their matting covers, but the bullocks with serious faces, and comfortable sacking coats, still kept the line with mechanical propriety. Occasionally we passed these carriers, already bivouacked, and performing the evening ablutions, or feeding their cattle, or squatting round great fires, cooking the inevitable chupattie. When the firelight fell on me, and my well-known white horse, I was always greeted with profound salaams—for Cassim and I, were a familiar object, to all the frequenters of the grand trunk road.

"I see you are a great personage in this part of the world, Miss Barrington," remarked Captain Fitzroy. "Wherever you go, you are received like Royalty; you are the Princess of the Jungle."

"My name, Ranee, is my only claim to that rank," I answered, raising my hand to acknowledge a whole group of salaams.

"That must be your modesty; surely there

is some more solid reason, which causes all the population, old and young, to prostrate themselves before your very shadow?"

"It is for father's sake," I answered frankly. "He is much looked up to and respected. He is called the Tiger Lord."

"The Tiger Lord," ejaculated Mr. Hare. "What a jolly name!"

"Yes; long ago this country was infested with Tigers. There were man-eaters like the one that followed Captain Fitzroy, villages were deserted, crops left standing, and people only ventured out armed, and in bands. 'Holloo,' our Shikarri, saw the bodies of twenty people, who had been killed by one Tiger, and he and another man, were attacked by him, in broad daylight, and beat him off with their hatchets with the greatest difficulty: he was said to have killed nearly two hundred victims. Father killed him, by stratagem at last; for he was so cunning, it was almost impossible to track him. He dressed up a dummy man on a bullock-cart, and drove behind on another, along a road the Tiger haunted—and the plan succeeded, for the brute sprang on the dummy, and father

shot him dead. Of course there was great joy all over the country, and people began to venture out once more, and to drive off the deer and wild pigs who were destroying their crops. Father has killed such numbers of tigers, that this district is now considered comparatively safe."

"Then I don't wonder that he is looked upon as a great man, and called the Tiger Lord," said Mr. Hare emphatically.

"Yes, and besides this, he practises his profession still, for the benefit of the people. They have great faith in him, and come many miles to consult him, and—and—" here I stammered and hesitated, "and lastly, he gives them money."

"A species of benevolence, which appeals to them more directly, than killing tigers, and healing disease," remarked Captain Fitzroy rather drily.

(Our household expenses were very small, we had our own flocks and herds, our clothes cost next to nothing, grain and wages were extremely cheap, and father was able to divide what seemed a princely income among our poorer neighbours.)

"And how does he disburse it?" asked Mr. Hare.

"Some come to the Bungalow—the blind, and aged, that live close by. A piece of silver, is a fortune to them, for coppers and shell cowries, are the coin of the country.—To those at a distance, I ride with their pensions; and, for others, father sends the money to the village malgoozar."

"I wonder you are not afraid of being robbed," remarked Peter, "going about the country with bags of coin!"

"No one would rob *me*!" I answered, rather haughtily.

"Well, any way, I'm sure you are jolly well humbugged," persisted this irrepressible youth.

"I don't think so," I returned stoutly. "I see all the poverty, misery, and patience with my own eyes."

"Of course you speak the language perfectly?" remarked Captain Fitzroy.

"Yes; Marathi, Hindostani, and a little Telagu."

"Ah!" he exclaimed with a smile—he really had a charming smile. "I wonder if your Hin-

dostani is similar to that of other ladies—all in the imperative mood? Ow—low—jow?"

To this question I did not condescend a reply.

"Look here, Miss Barrington," said Peter suddenly. "Are you not in want of an assistant-almoner, or private secretary? For I know, a highly respectable young man, who can be well recommended; no encumbrance, no objection to travel—and who might suit."

"Meaning himself," said Captain Fitzroy, in answer to my stare of interrogation. "But do not have anything to say to him. He is idle, impudent, and impecunious, and would bolt with the money, and your diamond necklace, on the first opportunity."

"And this man calls himself my friend!" exclaimed Peter, with mock indignation; and Peter's remark brought us to the avenue of Peepul trees, and the end of our ride.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WHO IS MRS. GRUNDY?”

“But, for mine own part, it was Greek to me.”

Julius Cæsar.

THE day after the Tiger procession, was one of the hottest I ever experienced. The hours slowly weltered on, till evening, and then we all assembled, and sat on the verandah, and endeavoured to bear up against the thermometer.

Colonel Raitt smoked, Captain Fitzroy played chess with me, and Mr. Hare made a third at the table, and kept up a running fire of remarks on our game, and made ridiculous suggestions that, to people of less beautiful tempers, would have been irritating,—if not absolutely maddening.

“Look here, Miss Barrington,” said Colonel

Raitt suddenly. "I'll tell you what it is! We must have you down to Gurrumpore next cold weather. I have a daughter about your age" — (she was twenty-five) — "would you like to come?"

"Very much indeed, thank you!" was my strictly truthful reply.

"We have a fine big house—there's lots of room in it—and so, after the first break in the rains, we shall expect you."

Here Mr. Hare chimed in, and he and Colonel Raitt, alternately painted the delights of Gurrumpore in glowing colours—and indeed it did not need their brilliant descriptions, to fire my easily-wrought-upon imagination. I listened eagerly, with parted lips, whilst one inducement after another was placed before me. Meanwhile, as I afterwards remembered, Captain Fitzroy toyed with the neglected chessman and said *nothing!*

"Oh, Barrington, here you are at last!" exclaimed Colonel Raitt, as father, who had been arranging for their departure at cockcrow next morning, now joined us. "You are just in the nick of time! Your daughter and I

have it all settled. After the rains she is coming down to Gurrumpore."

Father made no reply, but sat down, and commenced to stir his coffee.

"Well, what do you say, eh?"

"Oh, if it is all arranged, there is no occasion to refer to *me*!"

"Father, you know very well that nothing is ever decided without you," I broke in impetuously. "Perhaps the next time you go away from home——"

"I am not going from home," he replied shortly.

I knew his moods, and my heart, that had beat so fast in anticipation of unknown delights, now sank like lead.

"Much obliged to you, Raitt, but I cannot spare her. She would be out of her element in your gay life, and miserably homesick, before she was twenty-four hours in Gurrumpore. She is far happier where she is."

"Now, John Barrington, you don't mean to tell me, that you are going to keep the girl a prisoner for life," began Colonel Raitt explosively; but catching a look in father's face, he

paused, and rounded off his sentence somewhat lamely, saying, "oh, of course every one knows their own business best, and I never put *my* finger in another man's pie. I think I'll take a second cup of coffee." Needless to say, that I had listened with breathless interest, whilst my fate hung trembling in the balance; and as I turned to resume my interrupted game of chess, I could not prevent my lip from quivering, and two unruly tears escaped from my eyes, and fell with unmistakable little splashes on the chess-board; and it was only by an immense outlay of self-command that I was enabled to keep back many others. No one, but a girl brought up as I had been, could understand the pang I felt, as I saw the only available door into the outer world, thus figuratively locked and bolted! Colonel Raitt did not notice me, neither did father; but my wet eyes were not lost on Peter Hare, for I saw him making frantic signs to Colonel Raitt to renew the assault; but Colonel Raitt was insensible to the hint—he and I knew father, and the other did not. Captain Fitzroy now contrived in some mysterious manner to upset the chessboard—

which catastrophe created a merciful diversion—and then briskly suggested, that “as the moon was up, we might as well go outside, and take a stroll.” This idea was cordially welcomed by the whole party, and we sallied forth *en masse* (which seemed to me not quite the original programme). We sauntered about the place, and at last found our way to the old ruins. They had quite an imposing appearance in the moonlight, and father pointed out the supposed whereabouts of the great courtyard, the tanks, towers, baths, and women’s quarters; to each suggested site, Colonel Raitt took objection, and as he wrangled and argued against the possibility of the ruin, having ever been a fort *at all*, we younger folk, rather meanly moved on, leaving him gesticulating violently, to his victimised schoolfellow.

“I hope your father will change his mind about Gurrumpore,” said Peter. “We must see you down there this winter.”

“I do not think you will—indeed I am certain I shall never see Gurrumpore,” I answered dismally.

"We shall never forget our visit to Paldi," said Captain Fitzroy with unexpected emphasis.

"Forget it! No!" echoed Peter. "And if we are not to look forward, to seeing you at Gurrumpore, Miss Barrington, we shall spend the rest of our lives, with our heads over our shoulders, looking *back*." Here he was suddenly interrupted by the sight of a Hyena. "Hullo! hullo!" he cried; "there he goes, lobbing along, by that old wall. Come along, Fitz, and have a spurt. Hie on, Tumbie!" to Captain Fitzroy's dog. This animal eagerly accepted the invitation which its master disdained, and set off as full of zeal and enthusiasm, as Peter himself.

"Blessed Hyena!" muttered Captain Fitzroy, as he stood and looked after the pair in full chase of a shadowy *something*, that was crossing the ruins.

"What did you say?" I inquired suspiciously.

"Oh, only that it's not good enough! I'm too old for that sort of thing."

"How old are you?" was my uncivilised question.

"Twenty-eight," he replied, with a look of amusement. "Twenty-eight, on the second of April—a narrow shave."

"Ten years older than I am! I wonder what I shall be like in ten years' time?"

"Ten years' time?" turning, and gravely surveying me. "Perhaps not quite so slight, and possibly not quite so light-hearted."

"*Am* I light-hearted?"

"Well, I should say so, from the way I saw you skipping about with a kid this morning. You make me feel quite a child again, to watch you, and I was strongly inclined to go and cut in, and join the fun."

"Then go *now*," pointing to the ruins.

"No, no, that's another thing. After dinner, is not before breakfast! Look here, Miss Barrington," he added more seriously; "perhaps you may have wondered, when they were all urging you to come to Gurrumpore, why *I* said nothing?"

I *had* wondered, and had done more than wonder, I had been deeply hurt, for I liked Captain Fitzroy the best of all our visitors,

and his strange indifference, had given me a twinge of mind, that was as painful as it was extraordinary!

"Don't you think, that I should like to see you again?" he asked, with his eyes riveted upon me.

I made no answer—silence was golden.

"Well, I thought there was no use in praising up the place, or in arguing with your father, because I know for a positive fact, that you will be in Gurrumpore before long."

"Never!" I dissented emphatically.

"And I say yes, and in less than six months. My presentiments never fail me."

"But when father says I am not to go—how can I?" I demanded rather scornfully.

"Ah, that is more than I can explain. I can only tell you that you will *go*! I wonder what you will think of everything. I am inclined to envy you!"

"Envy *me*?" I echoed in querulous amazement.

"Certainly. Life is new to you. You will be like a person brought from another planet. You have much to see, and many novel sensations to experience; and you will wonder at the rest

of the world, to whom 'there is nothing new, and nothing true, and it does not signify'!"

"Is that your case?"

"Not quite; but I must confess that a few of my illusions have been dispelled. I have removed the guilt, and penetrated to the brown ginger-bread."

"I am sure the world beyond the jungle, the world of society, is a most delightful place. Oh! if I only could see it for a month, I should be happy," I said, clasping my hands rapturously.

"You talk as if it was Heaven, Miss Barrington. I only wish it were, for your sake, —and my own."

"I fancy a good deal of that, lies in one's own power," I remarked sententiously.

"Undoubtedly; and it is in *your* power, to make this jungle a paradise to yourself."

"Nonsense," I said indignantly. "You are as bad as Father Paul."

"Who is Father Paul?" he asked. "A missionary?"

"Never mind now; but please tell me, *do* I strike you as being strangely uncouth, and ignorant?"

"No, by no means," was his polite, and inevitable reply.

"But I *am* very ignorant," I admitted in a doleful voice.

"Sometimes ignorance is bliss, and when it departs, bliss is apt to follow."

"I don't think ignorance is bliss. I want to see——"

"And to *be* seen," he suggested rather sharply.

"No, but to meet people, and to know what their lives are like, and to make acquaintances with other ladies."

"Yes," he said, looking at me with that odd twinkle in his eye, and his head a little on one side. "I wonder what you will say to Mrs. Grundy?"

"Who is Mrs. Grundy?" I asked. "Does she live in Gurrumpore?"

"Yes, she lives in Gurrumpore. As to who she is, *never mind*, as you said just now, when I made a similar inquiry about Father Paul."

"And I was very rude! I am afraid I am often very rude, but I am so anxious to make the most of my time, and ask *you* questions. I'll tell you all about Father Paul now, if you will tell me about that, that—lady?"

"Too late," he said, shaking his head quite gravely. "I am offended, you have wounded my feelings in their most sensitive point."

"Have I really?" I asked in genuine alarm. "I did not mean it—please forgive me."

At this he burst out laughing, and said: "Never mind, Miss Barrington, I was only joking. Is there any other question I can answer for you? I place my knowledge at your disposal!"

"Yes," I returned promptly—ever ready and athirst for information.—"Tell me what is a flirtation? Mr. Hare would not explain to me, he said I was to ask *you*. Is it a game, that girls play at in Gurrumpore, or what?"

Captain Fitzroy gave me a quick side-glance, and then replied:

"Mr. Hare is a proficient! He knows a great deal more about it, than I do."

"But you have not answered my question," I persisted. "*What* is it?"

"Well, Punch, who is a good authority, declared that it was 'a spoon with nothing in it.'"

I gazed at him blankly.—He was trying to mystify me, on purpose.

"Who is Punch?" I demanded rather sharply.

"What! Have you never seen Punch?" he exclaimed with a gesture of mock despair. "Then, Miss Barrington, I give you up."

Seeing that I looked excessively miserable, he added: "Never mind, when you come down to Gurrumpore, you shall be introduced to Mr. Punch, as well as Mrs. Grundy; and I dare say we might manage to show you a flirtation or two."

For a moment he remained silently looking at me, with that puzzling expression in his eyes. Then dropping his bantering tone, added: "Do you know, Miss Barrington, that *we* shall always be your oldest friends? Although you only saw us for the first time last Monday, you can never get out of that."

"Do you think I shall *want* to get out of it?" I asked indignantly. "Am I likely to have so many friends?"

"Well, many or few, you will not forget *our* claim, will you? If Peter and I can ever serve you in any way, you will give us the first refusal, before strange folks. Promise!"

"I promise," I said rather shortly—just to oblige him, for I was fully convinced, in my own mind, that I would never see one or other of them again. I turned away rather hastily, and gazed at the plains across the river, the dim mysterious line of distant forest, then at the reflections of the stars, all glittering so brightly on the bosom of the Karrhan. How lovely it all looked! Hateful, unfeeling scene! and it would look just the same to-morrow, after *they* had gone.

"I could fancy some people, becoming very much attached to this place," remarked my companion thoughtfully.

"And *I* can not," I retorted very sharply.

"Yet you have many sources of enjoyment!" he urged, with irritating tranquillity.

"Do you think so? How would *you* like this life yourself?"

"I am different.—I am a soldier, a born wanderer—a stirring life for me, or none; I only said *some* people. And I question whether you have not much the best of it, leading this wild, free existence—the Lady Bountiful, and

Queen of all the country—than as one of the mob of tennis-playing girls, in Gurrumpore."

"You are only saying this to tease me!" I exclaimed impatiently. "You *know* there is no comparison between us."

"No comparison, indeed," and he laughed and shrugged his shoulders as he spoke.

"Captain Fitzroy," I said reproachfully, "you laugh at everything.—Is *everything* ridiculous, is everything a joke? Do you believe in anything?"

"Yes, of course, I believe in lots of things."

"As for instance?" I asked peremptorily.

"Well, I can give you one on the spot; I believe in *you*."

"Believe there's dew! Bosh, my dear fellow," panted Peter, who now came running up, hot and breathless, "whoever saw dew on a night like this?"

"And so it was a wild-goose chase, after all," said his friend, not a whit discomposed by the interruption.

"Yes! No one would suppose to look at

the beggar that he was lobbing along at such a pace. I say, Miss Barrington, you may not be aware of the fact, but your father's whistle has been going for the last ten minutes!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PEGGY FEELS BETTER.

“Come quickly, gentle lady,
The fit’s upon me now!”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

AFTER a storm a calm, after excitement reaction. After the departure of our three guests, a dead, dull, flatness, settled down like a pall upon Paldi, and something else as well; the clouds which had been banking up for weeks in the west, now began to utter low growls of thunder, and vivid lightning flashed along the horizon, like a glittering blade. The heat was insupportable; all Nature seemed to be crying aloud for rain, for life! The stony yellow earth, the shrunken, languid river, the leafless trees, the starving, panting cattle. And then it came at last, heralded

by a few large drops, then by a thunderstorm, finally the deluge! A deluge, that seemed as if it would beat the Bungalow into the ground, or sweep it away into the now brown, and brimming Karrhan. Floods from far distant hills renewed its life, and it now swept away past Paldi, a wide, very rapid, and majestic river. It was going into the world to towns, and possibly to sea-ports, and to ships. I watched it enviously, as hour after hour, it hurried by, in one increasing torrent, with great eddies and streaks of white foam, whirling on its bosom. The rains descended for a fortnight, and afforded Peggy ample leisure for praying and cooking; father passed the time in correcting manuscripts, and curing skins; I, unlucky wretch, had, as usual, nothing to do. I had *no* hobby. Besides this, the rains never agreed with me, nor revived *me*, like the earth and trees; on the contrary, I always felt languid and depressed, and my naturally sharp, white face, looked sharper and whiter than ever.

One pouring, dull afternoon, I sat in the drawing-room alone, endeavouring to do some stitching, as well as the light would permit,

and vainly trying *not* to think of the delights of Gurrumpore, when I was abruptly joined by Peggy, with a flushed face, and rather sparkling eyes—with her, an infallible sign, of great indignation, or of great joy.—It was indignation this time.

“Well!” she said, suddenly sitting down and fanning herself with her apron. “I’ve been having it out with the masther, at long last!”

“About what?” I asked, laying down my work.

“Why, about *you*, and what else? I put a good deal off me mind, and I’m all the better for it.”

“What do you mean, Peggy? What were you saying about me?” I inquired, with very natural curiosity.

“Well, I’ll just tell you every word said, as if you were there yourself. He was saying, ‘That you looked very pale and thin, and had no appetite, and no spirit;’ and he said, ‘that it was the bad effect a glimpse of the world had on you, and what was to be done?’

“‘There’s only *one* cure that I’m aware of,’ says I, just up to him. ‘And that’s a hair of

the dog that bit her! Let her go off to Colonel Raitt's, and get some diversion. Sure, it's not in nature, for the child to live here always.'

"'We do,' says he.

"'The back of me hand to you,' says I. 'Sure I am an ould woman, and you're an ould man, and we have had our sport. I'm like an ould cat basking in the sun, and she's a young kitten, looking for something to play with. It's *my* opinion that if ye keep her cooped up, she will only pine and pine, till she goes off in a decline.'

"'Where did ye get that notion?' says the masther, turning on me very sharp.

"'I just took it out of me own head, and there's me advice, since you axed it, to take or lave.'

"'You don't think,' says he, and then he got it out at last, 'you don't think that either of those young fellows, have been making love to her?'

"'Have they been making love to *me*?' says I. 'Glory to goodness, sure she has no notion of lovers and courtin' yet!'

"'Maybe they put it into her head,' says he.

“‘Not they,’ says I. ‘The young one was too full of his jokes and capers; and the other, was just an honourable gentleman—he saw she was but an innocent child, and he left her as he found her. And besides that, ye never gave them a chance; sure, out of the four days they were staying here, they were away for three; and when they *wor* here, if she was out of your sight for five minutes, there was your whistle going, like the driver on an express train!’

“‘They had a good deal of talk together all the same,’ says he.

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘but you are the quare man! Living so much alone, has twisted your mind. If it will be any relief, or pleasure to you, to know, I can give you a sketch of their discourse: they talked of books, and strange countries, and how he put in his time—no more harm than if they were two young ladies;—faix, nor maybe half as much!’

“‘I had a letter last week from Mrs. Raitt, begging me to allow Ranee to pay them a visit.’

“‘And what did you say?’ says I.

“‘That I could not spare her.’

"Now, Miss Ranee, after this I fell into a terrible passion, he looked so cool, and so dead set, in his own way, as if there was no such thing as youth and pleasure."

"I don't believe there is," I replied. "I feel as if I was about fifty years of age; it is only six weeks since Colonel Raitt went away, and it seems to be at least six *years*. And what else did you say?"

"I said—but, mind you, *this* was only to frighten him—'that one of these days, he would have to spare you in a way he would like *less*. There's one grave in the compound already,' says I, 'the collector's wife, and you are just going the right way to have another.'"

"Oh, Peggy!" I interrupted, greatly shocked. "How *could* you say that? You know she drowned herself in the Karrhan."

"Of course she did! Sure don't we all know that!"

"'The place is not unhealthy,' says the masther, 'and you are only trying to frighten me.'"

"'Well, look at her,' was all I said. 'Isn't

she a shadow of what she ought to be? No colour, no appetite, and a face as long, as if she was going to a priest's funeral. One would think you were King Pharaoh, and she was the children of Israel, your heart is so hardened against letting her go.' To make a long story short, Miss Ranee, some time next year, you are to go down to Bombay, and take a trip on the say, as far as Suez. I got *that* promise for you, and indeed it's not much.—There's no great pleasure in a railway journey; and if you take after most people, regarding the say, you will be praying the captain on your bended knees, to let you get out and *walk*."

"I would ten times rather go to Gurrumpore," I remarked ungratefully.

"Ay; but he won't listen to that—at *no* price.—Maybe I should not have told you, all this, Miss Ranee?"

"Maybe not, Peggy," I assented thoughtfully.

"Well, it's too late to think of that now! When I am angry, the tongue, gits the upper hand of me, and I can't stop, till I say my say." (A not uncommon peculiarity.)

"Who is to come with me, if I go away, Peggy?" I asked rather gloomily.

"Why, I will, for one.—I'll stick by you, wherever you go; and stay with you, by say or land, till I become that old, that maybe you'll have to *shoot* me! Well, I'm wasting me time finely here, and I must go off now and print the butter—faix, it wasn't much butter I put on me words to the master. I had the best of him this time!" And with this triumphant reflection, she hurried out of the room; and soon after, I heard her droning away, at her solitary song, a sure sign that she was busily occupied in both mind and body.

"It's a sorrowful ditty
 I'll sing to you now,
 It's about an old man
 Who had but one cow.
 He often times brought her
 To the byre to be fed—
 But now to his great grief
 His p—o—o—r cow is dead.
 Arrah—Drimmin Duhh—a—r—agra,
 Arrah—Drimmin Duhh—a—r—agra—
 Arrah—Drimmin Deelish
 Wusrusthu ma cree!"

The lament at the end of the verse, being given

in a wild, wailing screech. Then followed quite gaily :

“ Her sides they were short,
 And her tail it was long,
 You could spansel her legs
 With a brogue maker’s thong ;
 Her sides they were short,
 And her tail it was frisky,
 And her *milk*, it was stronger,
 And *swater* than whisky.
 Arrah—Drimmin Duhh—a—r—agra,
 Arrah—Drimmin Duhh—a—r—agra—
 Arrah—Drimmin Deelish
 Wusrusthu ma cree ! ”

CHAPTER XV.

RUKOO'S LEGACY.

“Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape.”

Hamlet.

AND so the days dragged by, more drowsily than ever, but one of them, to our great satisfaction, brought Father Paul; and never had Father Paul been so welcome—no, not since he had first discovered our jungle retreat. I believe the true reason of this was, that we had each some special confidence to make to him—something to impart, that we could not comfortably confide in one another. The padre was in the highest spirits, and was by far the most lively and talkative of the whole party; although for once, it was *we*, who had a great budget of

surprising news for his attentive ear! He was a most sympathetic listener, and a close examiner—very closely he cross-questioned *me*, and I, was only too delighted to recall and relate, all the events, hour by hour, and word by word, of these two, never-to-be-forgotten, wonderful days.

“And which of the guests did you like best?” he asked playfully.

I was silent, and to assist my memory, he added: “Your father’s old schoolfellow?”

“No, certainly not,” I returned brusquely.

“No. Then who?”

It never occurred to my artless mind, to give an evasive answer, much less to tell an untruth. I was accustomed to speak out boldly, and fearlessly; and without a stammer or a blush, I replied, “Captain Fitzroy.”

“Oh!” regarding me fixedly, “and what is he like?” no longer speaking in a bantering tone.

“He is tall,” I promptly rejoined, “but not so tall as father, and holds himself very erect. He rides splendidly. He is always in a good humour, and is very amusing.”

"Amusing, is he?" said Father Paul, drawing in his lips.

"Yes, he has such merry, dark blue eyes. I could imagine his having a very pretty sister. I liked Mr. Hare, too," I added hastily, "only *he* treated me as if I was quite a little girl, and he talked such nonsense—indeed, I like them *all*, Father Paul. I wish you had seen them! I wish you had been here!"

"I wish I had," he echoed gravely. "Tell me some more about them, *ma fille*."

Thus encouraged, I proceeded to sketch Colonel Raitt, and then Mr. Hare, with rapid, vigorous strokes. It was new to me, to be asked to describe people—and I liked it; but I noticed that the padre was not much interested in these latest portraits, and seemed unusually grave and *distract*.

The night after the padre's arrival, I, who was a notorious dreamer, and gloried in relating my visions, had the most horrible dream I ever experienced. I dreamt, that some appalling object—*not* human—was chasing me through the old ruins, and worse than this, it was overtaking me! I had rushed into a passage, from which

there was no outlet, and was tearing at the wall with frantic fingers, whilst this too awful *something* was approaching me at last. Nearer it came; it seemed to have clutched me, and so vivid was the vision, that I awoke with a stifled shriek. The room was in total darkness; the little nightlight, flickered spasmodically, at its last gasp. There was not a sound to be heard, save the rushing of the river, or the squeak of a musk rat in the old black wood wainscot. With a deep sigh of relief, that it was only a dream after all, I closed my eyes, and was just dropping off to sleep, with the delightful facility of eighteen, when my heart suddenly stopped beating, a cold perspiration broke out on my forehead, for I distinctly felt, an *icy skeleton hand*, passed slowly across my face.

I could not scream, or articulate, my very tongue seemed paralysed! With a desperate jerk, I sought the only possible refuge, and plunged my head under the bed-clothes. There I lay half-suffocated, listening to the violent thumping of my own heart, until a distant clock struck "one," and I really could not exist

without air any longer. Air, I must have, at all costs, and I timidly uncovered my face, and lay in agonised expectancy of the icy hand, for what seemed to me *hours*. People said that the collector's wife roamed about her old haunts still—a tall woman in a gray dress, with black hair falling over her shoulders; a young woman, too, given to suddenly appearing in doorways in the dusk, and pacing the verandah, wringing her hands, and, stranger than *all*, to playing on the old piano on stormy nights! This was a miracle of miracles, for that venerable instrument had no key-board, and all the interior and strings had long been removed. The wires were used to twine creepers, and the empty vacuum served as a box, to contain newspapers, work, and lumber of all kinds. Still the servants whispered, and I wormed it out of Peggy, who had heard it at Kolar, that on windy nights, most wonderful music, had been heard in our drawing-room, and that a woman's thrilling voice, was distinctly audible, singing, "Home, Sweet Home."

These stories, that I scoffed at in the daylight, came back to me now, in the darkness and solitude, and I suppose, I ought to be

ashamed to confess, that I trembled all over, exactly as if I had the ague!

Hark! What was that sound, that groping noise, near the door? I was just on the point of making another dash under the bed-clothes, when I heard a voice out of the darkness—a familiar, cracked, guttural voice, which said, “Maharanee!”

“Who—who—is it?” I quavered out tremulously.

“It is only old Rukoo, Hazoor,” was the answer from the doorway. “Ghureeb Purwar! Come out and speak to your slave.”

To know that I owed my fright, to a human visitor, was some small consolation, but I was excessively wroth with old Rukoo; the miserable old creature had lost his way, and given me a terrible fright.

I rose, and lit a candle.—The candle completely restored my confidence.—I threw on a dressing-gown, and marched out into the verandah, in a very lofty, and indignant frame of mind.

“Pray what does this mean?” I demanded, waving my taper, over the wretched little

crouching figure. "Have you gone mad? What do you want?"

"I am come to bring you a great fortune, Maharanee," he gibbered, laying hold of the skirt of my dressing-gown. "I am going at last:—my heart is cold—my hour has come; but before I go, I must speak to some one, of Soondra's treasure—the great treasure, which lies buried in the ruins."

"And can you not wait till the daytime?" I asked very sharply.

"No, at the word gold, even a corpse will open its mouth, and this fortune is all for *you*. Oh, my beautiful Maharanee, that are like the goddess Seeta herself. To *you* alone, will I confide the secret of the ruins. Ah, silence may defy a mountain, and I have kept silence long."

"And about what?" I asked impatiently, as I stood barefooted and shivering in the cold verandah. "Do be quick, for I am perished."

"About lakhs of rupees, and piles of rubies, and diamonds, and emeralds, arms of gold, and horse trappings of pearl, trappings of jewels! Ghureeb Purwar!" throwing up his withered arms as he spoke.

“And why have you not taken it yourself?”

“Hazoor! can a hawk carry away the sky?”

he screamed. “Moreover, you know that all these buried treasures, are guarded by an evil spirit, and there is one *here*, that is too strong for any magic wallah; there is a curse on the spot. Hazoor! you have often asked me to tell you the story of my life.—Will you hear it now? Will you listen to me before it ends—you who are beautiful as the star Arundathi?”

The night was bitterly cold, a chill, misty rain, was drifting into the verandah. A more unseasonable hour, for a confidential communication, could not well be imagined. Nevertheless, I was under the command of my curiosity,—and my curiosity was tyrannical, and desired me to remain; so I sat down on a low chair, placed my candle on a table, and intimated by a sign to Rukoo, who squatted on the floor, that I was willing to hear what he had to say.

“But you know,” I expostulated, “that it is very strange of you, rousing me in this way in the middle of the night. Why could you not have waited until to-morrow?”

“To-morrow I shall not be here,” he screamed

in his cracked voice. "To-morrow, I shall know much. I shall know whose are the true Gods, yours, or ours. Hearken well, Maharanee, for I am coming to my last breath. I was a soldier once, like all my kin. My father was killed at the battle of Paniput. Then I took service under Janojee, and was one of the thirty thousand horsemen, that scoured these plains. Our enemies were as cotton before the wind. I was with Nizam Ali, when he sacked the city of Poonah. Ah," drawing a dreadful rattling breath, "*those* were days! Afterwards, I took service under a chief who owned this fort. A fierce, strong man—they called him 'Soondra Bagh.' Yes, he had no more pity than a tiger.—He killed, and plundered many people, he tortured prisoners to find treasure. He had no mercy, no, not even on the women of his own house! Ah! the old well at the East gate, could it speak! Hazoor, you would not think, that these two arms, could wield a Tulwar, or these two hands," holding up a pair of fleshless claws, "could strangle a soft screaming throat, but they *did*."

I looked down at the ghastly little figure, in

front of me, and shuddered involuntarily.—Surely he was in his dotage.

“There was one,” he continued hoarsely. “She was a slave from the North. She was fair as the moon ; but her heart was black. Her hair swept the ground, as we bore her along. She knew well *where*. Had she not sent others to the same place? We bricked her up alive.”

“Rukoo,” I cried indignantly, “you are insane, or you are a fiend !”

“Nay, Hazoor, I was but a servant. She fought like a wild panther, and we tied her hands. She struggled desperately, she was so strong, and young ; her shrieks, I hear them *now*. We gagged her, but ere that, she screamed to me ‘to save her, and I should have all the great treasure.’ Then ‘Soondra’ thrust his turban in her mouth, but not before I had heard the words, ‘Elephant Stone.’ Afterwards, I remembered having been told, that in the women’s quarter, in the court-yard, on one of the large flags, was traced the figure of an elephant. The stones have sunk, they are covered with the dust of ages ; one hundred

monsoons have swept over the place, but the Elephant Stone, and the treasure are *still* there."

"And the woman? What about the woman?"

I shouted in his ear.

"We bricked her up with stones and mortar—still alive; but when the stones were breast-high, I had compassion, and threw a great piece of rock on her chest, so that she might not linger, but die soon."

"*Wretch!*" I shrieked passionately.

"Ay, our race are soldiers; we are used to killing. *She* is the worst of all, she never rests."

Here he was obliged to pause, gasping painfully for breath.

"Years afterwards, the fort was taken, Soondra was strangled, and the place looted; but no one knew the secret of the Elephant Stone but *me*. I have been starving at times, though I am the richest man in the country. Many a night have I slept above my fortune; many a year; I loved to feel that, within a few feet of me, were gold mohurs, and big jewels: they were all mine, and *they* nourished me, and kept me alive, though I had never seen them. The Elephant Stone,

has sunk, you will have a difficulty to reach it; it lies a foot below the earth and mud which covers what was once a marble courtyard; it is the furthest off, and the Elephant Stone is close to a mark I have made on the wall—three round holes.”

“Why have you never tried to take the treasure yourself?” I asked for the second time.

“What can one old man do, Hazoor? When the fort was sacked, I was then aged. I crept to the women’s quarter, and saw the stone, that was all I could do. To reveal its secret, were to offer my body to the river, my throat to the knife; besides, *she* would not let me. No, Maharanee, my hands have never touched it; but yours are pure, she cannot prevail against *you*. Here, you are like a beautiful ruby in an old rag, in this desolate jungle. But with this fortune, decked with priceless jewels, you will go to great cities—you will rule men, and you will not forget old Rukoo, who——”

“What the Devil is this? Or is it the Devil?” suddenly demanded a gruff voice, and

father, lamp in hand, and rather sketchily attired, appeared on the verandah. "What does this mean? I heard you shouting at some one. What is the old man doing?" he asked imperiously.

"He came and awoke me," I answered. "He thinks he is going to die. He had been telling me most awful things about a woman, that was murdered, and about a great treasure that is buried in the ruins."

"Great fiddlestick!" echoed my parent angrily, "he has been drinking bang, the old brute; where is he?" he demanded, waving his light about. "What has become of him?"

But there was no one to be seen, or heard; Rukoo had suddenly and mysteriously, melted away into the surrounding darkness.

"I am sure there is something in it, father," I remarked. "He never did this before."

"I should hope not, or he would have been pitched out, neck and crop. The idea of his daring to come, and awake you in the middle of the night, in order to relate some cock-and-bull story that had suddenly occurred to him. It's beyond a joke. He is crazy."

"I do not think so," I persisted. "He talked more sensibly than I ever heard him."

"He might easily do that."

"He declares there is a great treasure buried under an Elephant Stone, that is," correcting myself, "an Elephant is traced on the Stone."

"Oh! What stone?"

"One in the far courtyard. It is not visible now."

"No," sarcastically. "I shouldn't think it was."

"But, father, I believe there is something in it," I argued boldly, "for I was told, that an Elephant would bring me fortune."

"Where did you hear such rubbish?"

"From a fortune-teller, about four months ago."

"Diana, I am surprised at you," he exclaimed very sternly. "So much for bringing you up surrounded by superstitious natives. There is *some* excuse for old Rukoo—a gibbering idiot—but there is really no such plea for you! Go to your room at once, and never let me hear you talk such nonsense again."

Thus severely admonished, I went back to

bed in a most crestfallen condition; but I was too excited to sleep! Sleep did not visit me, till the twittering of birds, and gray streaks of light, as well as the shouts of drovers, and tinkling of cattle bells, betokened that the rest of the world was awakening.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOONDRA'S TREASURE.

“Heaps of pearls,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels.”

Richard III.

NO account of my early years could possibly be complete, without honourable mention of our chief domestics ; and in our lonely, isolated life, they played no inconspicuous part. First in rank and importance came “Hassan,” our Moham-medan butler ; with black eyes and beard, sharp, hawk-like features, and snowy clothes. His manners were deferential, even to Peggy ; his footfall was cat-like, and his voice low. He was an invaluable servant—smart, capable, and full of resource. He could do many things, from

making a pie, to grooming a horse, or pitching a tent; but he was rarely called upon to undertake any tasks, beyond his own legitimate province. During the many years he had been at Paldi, no one had ever seen Hassan once out of temper. He was always polite, always dignified—and nearly always silent. Peggy declared, that the only thing he cared for was money; that nothing but the “love of lucre” kept him in the jungle—which was very probable; and that he robbed father out of the face! If this was the case, I can only add, that he robbed him, in a very attentive and gentlemanlike manner.

“Jairan” was a complete contrast to Hassan; he was responsible for all our cows and herds. A good-humoured, simple-minded, man, with clear high-bred features, and soft brown eyes. He wore an enormous yellow turban, year after year, and belonged to the “Gowlee” caste; was next door to a Brahmin, and most rigorous with regard to washing and prayers, and lived meagrely on chupatties and water.—Now, Hassan was a self-indulgent creature, and smoked cheroots, ate meat twice a day, and, despite of his religion, was not like Jairan, a patron of our well.

Hoolo, father's head shikarri, was another influential person. He was neither Mohammedan, or a mild Hindoo, but a "Gond," one of the aboriginal inhabitants of the district. His ancestors lived a wild forest life; killed and ate animals, and worshipped stocks and stones. In appearance he was forty years of age, short of stature, lean and bony, and somewhat of the Malay type, with a flat nose, swarthy skin, and high cheek-bones. He talked with much fluency and gesticulations, had an overweening opinion of himself, and was very off-hand, even in his manner to father—whom he nevertheless, not merely respected, but adored. He scorned small game, and devoted himself entirely to collecting 'Kubber' about tiger; travelling scores of miles with this sole end in view. Hoolo, was unequalled at organising a beat, making a machan, and bargaining for a miserable "Gara." More than this, he was a brave man, and a good shot, and his lacerated, scarred, brown back, and arms, told a tale of close quarters with bears, and panthers. Hoolo's reputation was only second to his master's; he was the "Tiger Lord's" right hand, or deputy, and had acquired a popularity that

he enjoyed with legitimate dignity, and self-satisfaction.

Last, but not least, was "Pallia," my Ayah, who had been with us for seventeen years—with considerable interludes of visiting her relations. When, tempted by father's large wages, she had first taken service at Paldi, she was thin, meek, and deeply in debt, like many of her class. The money-lenders had foreclosed on all her jewels, that pride of a native woman's existence (and well they may be, as they represent her sole fortune, and her social value!). A pair of copper bangles, and one tiny gold nose-ring, were all that adorned her lean person. But now, she was prosperous, her daughters were married, and handsomely adorned with gold ornaments, and she herself tinkled as she moved; numerous heavy bangles and anklets—all *solid* gold, no sealing-wax, as she earnestly assured us—decorated her wrists and ankles; her ears were almost hidden by large gold jewelled bosses, and a valuable ruby depended from her left nostril. She wore a silken saree, her velvet betel bag was always full, she drank coffee at her own good pleasure, and swaggered, as she walked.

Besides all this, she was no longer poor, and meek, and humble, but lazy, garrulous, and insolent, much addicted to gossip, and to quoting pithy native proverbs to enforce her remarks. Pallia and Peggy were outwardly on good terms, and never had any disagreement, excepting when Peggy, hot from the Mission at Kolar, made a renewed attempt to convert her fellow-servant; but Pallia had the same stereotyped reply to her eloquent persuasions.

"All my people good people," she would modestly affirm. "All my people who are dead, died heathen. Why I turning Christian?"

"Foolish woman!" Peggy would retort. "And if they are all in hell, is *that* any reason for you to go after them?"

"Where they are gone, I will go, same place," was Pallia's brave reply. "And why you talk to me like this, Missy Peggy? It is no use—it is like throwing one stone, among a flock of crows."

Then Peggy would argue, and Pallia would recriminate, the controversy would wax hotter and hotter, and these attempts at conversion, generally ended in floods of tears, and high

words. Pallia, who had gleaned—from listening, —some idea of Mrs. Magee's former social status, generally wound up the scene, by launching a poisoned dart about "second-hand people" —meaning second-class people—"second-hand people and soldiers' wives." And it would be *my* delicate mission, to heal the breach between Peggy and her subordinate, for the hundredth time!

The morning after my nocturnal adventure, Pallia came hurrying into my room, in a state of unusual excitement. She wanted to be first with some piece of news—that was plain to be seen.

"What you think, Miss Ranee?" she said.
"That old Rukoo, dead at last!"

I sat up, and looked at her sleepily.

"Yes, true I telling; one of the coolies found him this morning stiff and dead."

"Dead! And where did they find him?"

"In the ruins—in the far-away court, where he always used to live. He is, oh, so small!—as light as a baby—no bigger than a monkey—he could not weigh a quarter maund! How glad I am that he is dead! He was a bad

old man—as deceitful as an elephant, and as thievish as a cat. ‘Yana’ forgot him, but he has come for him at last.”

Marvellous to relate, I had sufficient sense and self-restraint, to hold my tongue, and refrained from imparting my recent adventure, to the loquacious Pallia. But it was not in human nature, to keep it altogether to myself; and when Peggy was brushing and plaiting my long locks, I related my experiences very deliberately and impressively; for I wished Peggy, to share my own firm conviction, that there was something more important in Rukoo’s disclosure, than the gibbering nonsense of a doting old man. Peggy was easily persuaded, and listened to my narrative with the deepest interest, and numerous ejaculations of “And do ye tell me so?” “And did I ever hear the like!” punctuated by painfully excited tugs, at my unfortunate hair; and when my toilette was completed, she rushed off with the tremendous news to Father Paul; and, to our great comfort and satisfaction, *he* was of the opinion, that there was something in it *too!*

As we stood talking together like three con-

spirators, father joined us, and the padre boldly accosted him at once.

“My friend, we are talking of last night.”

“So I supposed,” he said, rather gruffly. “That aged person, who disturbed Ranee, will have to find other quarters.”

“He has found them,” said the padre gravely. “He is dead !”

“Oh !”

“I am not sceptical of great hidden hoards in this country,” continued Father Paul. “If you had wandered over it for as many years as I have done, you would believe in buried treasure too.”

“Ah ! you always think the best of everything and everybody, and give even mother earth more credit than she deserves !” said father.

“At least you will admit, that in former times, Mahrattas were notorious robbers, my friend.”

“Oh, yes ; I’ll admit *that* of them, even to the present day !” he answered promptly.

“They carried off untold riches, from travelling caravans and merchants, and even sacked and burnt whole towns. Thousands of

lakhs were thus taken — taken years, ay, centuries, ago — and have never been traced or discovered. Notorious jewels, of enormous value, have totally disappeared.—Where are they?”

Father shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that he neither knew, or cared.

“Well, I will tell you,” continued the padre, holding out his hand, as if he were offering the treasure there, and then. “They are *buried*—hidden away in earth and sand, never to be seen by human eyes again.—Those who concealed them are dead, and the secret is buried with them, in their graves.”

“You are quite eloquent about this badly invested capital, Father Paul. And yet you set your face against riches!”

“Yes, for myself. I have taken the vow of poverty. But riches are a great power; and I am thinking of my poor!”

“Well,” rejoined father, “since you and Ranee are so sanguine, you shall have a dozen coolies to dig and root wherever you please, and if you do come across a marvellous horde, some will have to go to the Government, the rest you can

divide between you ; one half for your charities, and the other for Ranee's fortune ! ”

“ Ah, I see, you don't believe in it, my friend. What if I take you at your word ? ”

“ I mean what I say,” returned father emphatically. “ I don't believe you will find a brass ‘ Dub ;’ but if you do unearth a great treasure, I give you *my* share of it, with all my heart.”

“ Well, the ground is nice, and soft, after the rains,” I broke in eagerly, “ and a dozen coolies can easily clear out the sand and stuff from the far courtyard ; and if we do find a stone with an Elephant traced on it, father, perhaps you will believe in the treasure ? ”

“ Perhaps,” and he laughed. “ And now *perhaps* you will give us some breakfast.”

All that morning, through a searching, drizzling rain, Father Paul and I sat on a step in the inner courtyard, under the shelter of one big umbrella, and anxiously superintended the languid proceedings of a dozen coolies with spades and baskets. The whole court was to be cleared, to disarm suspicion, and this excavating work among the ruins, was supposed

to be one of Bibi Raneë's numerous strange freaks.

Little did those simply-clad natives suppose, that they were actually digging for a great treasure—Soondra's chief spoil.—I sat on the stone for nearly three hours, the very reverse of patience ; and at the end of that time, the portion near the wall had been cleared, and displayed a marble pavement, and oh, joy ! one of the blocks had the figure of an Elephant, cut quite distinctly into the stone.

Nothing in the way of raising that stone, could be accomplished till after dark ; so we reluctantly left our post, telling the coolies to “work away,” and carried our great news into the house. My excitement was at fever-heat, and I danced about the dining-room in a manner which justified our astonished servants, in considering me stark, staring mad. Peggy, in her own way, was fully as jubilant, the treasure seemed already discovered, and she said as much to father, who answered imperturbably :

“And if it is there, we shall have a nice piece of work to raise the stone. It is a feat that will require time, and strength, and, above all, secrecy ;

and if we *do* come upon gold and jewels, the news will be all over the place, and we shall have a band of Dacoits here, before we can say 'Jack Robinson.' However, the fact of a stone having an Elephant traced on it, proves nothing to *me*."

It proved a hard night's work to him, all the same.—He and Hassan, Hooloo, and Pochell, the shikarris, and another, laboured with ropes and chisels, for hours of darkness, whilst I held the light, and the padre and Peggy, gave all the assistance in their power. I, too, would gladly have dragged and delved, but father would not hear of it. An hour, two hours, passed, with but small results—patience, as I have already hinted, was not one of my strong points; and as I had caught a bad cold, from my recent midnight interview, I did not require much pressing to return to the Bungalow, and there await the grand result—if *grand* it was to be!

I went into the drawing-room, and took up a book and tried to read; what a farce! And yet it was not the love of money, or the greed of jewels, that made my heart beat so fast, as I

sat alone and waited. It was the craving for excitement, novelty, and something new to see, and talk about. This was the chief desire, that filled my restless, discontented mind. It seemed ages, before the heavy tramping of approaching feet assured me that *something* had been discovered, and then Peggy burst in lamp in hand, her hair greatly disordered (she always wore two little flat curls at the side of her face), her dress covered with dust and mud, and her apron in rags.

“Here it is, Miss Ranee! We have something for our trouble after all; but me back is fairly broke.”

Peggy was followed by father and the padre, and the servants, who were staggering along under the weight of a very heavy, curiously-shaped, chest.

They placed it down upon the floor, and left, and soon afterwards returned, bending under another larger and much heavier chest; and then they all stood wiping their faces, and panting for breath.

“And is that *all*?” I asked rather contemptuously.

"Yes," gasped Peggy, who had helped to carry in number two. "And now we are going to see what's in them! I feel so nervous, and so anxious, that my knees are just giving under me.—Supposing there was nothing in them but bones!"

"We shall soon see," said father, instantly commencing operations on the smaller chest. They were both long, and narrow, covered with plates of copper, and soldered with brass. Nevertheless, there was not much difficulty in opening them. Number one, contained a few rolls of ancient MS., bundles of silken garments, richly mounted pistols, and daggers, and quantities of silver ornaments, and bags of ancient rupees; on the whole, number one was a disappointment! But number two, was better; the top was stuffed with embroidered veils, then came silver horse trappings, covered with gold bosses and seed pearls—things seemed to have been thrust in in haste; next a turban stiff with blood, but blazing with a diamond aigrette, then wrapped in a woman's *saree* came quantities of splendid jewels. Peggy and I held our breath, as father disentangled them, and handed them out one after

another. A belt two inches deep, entirely encrusted with diamonds, and fastened by an enormous ruby clasp. After this, a chain sufficiently long to twist twice round one's neck, and composed of emeralds the size of marbles, and bored like beads; this was followed by strings of large pearls, diamond aigrettes, made of flat, rudely-cut stones; sapphire and ruby buttons, massive gold belts and bangles, necklets, earrings, and nose-rings, all studded with jewels of great value. Some were bent, and broken, as if they had been wrenched from their owners with considerable violence.

After the jewels, came ancient gold coins and gold mohurs, bits of broken gold cups, great stirrup-irons; you could easily bury your arms elbow deep in gold; no *wonder* the chest had been so heavy. At the very bottom of this box, was a coat, with dark stains—richly embroidered with pearls; and that was all.

After this, the last article, had been taken out, and examined, there was a dead silence, which was first broken by Father Paul.

“What riches!” he exclaimed. “What power for good or evil!”

"I suppose them things is worth a hape of money, your Reverence," said Peggy deferentially.

"Yes, Peggy; I am no great judge, but I should think that diamond belt alone, must represent some thousands."

"Then good luck to the ould Elephant," she cried, snapping her fingers. "Your fortune is made, Miss Ranee, me jewel! Come away off to your bed now. You haven't an eye in your head for sleep."

"What do you think of it all, Ranee?" inquired father gravely.

"Oh, it's wonderful! very wonderful!" I returned, with a tremendous yawn, for it was now about two o'clock in the morning, and all my ejaculations of admiration, and amazement, had long been exhausted.

"She's half dead with the sleep," explained Peggy. "You see she is not used to being up all night. We will leave you, and his Reverence, to discourse on the fortune, and go to our beds. Every bone in me body is sore! I feel as if I had been at a robbery, and house-breaking. Signs on it, they were terrible thieves in those

days ! Come away, my heart. You are fairly dead with the sleep ;” and, taking me by the arm, we left father, and the padre, to discuss the great discovery ; and Hassan, to finger, value, and repack the jewels.

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